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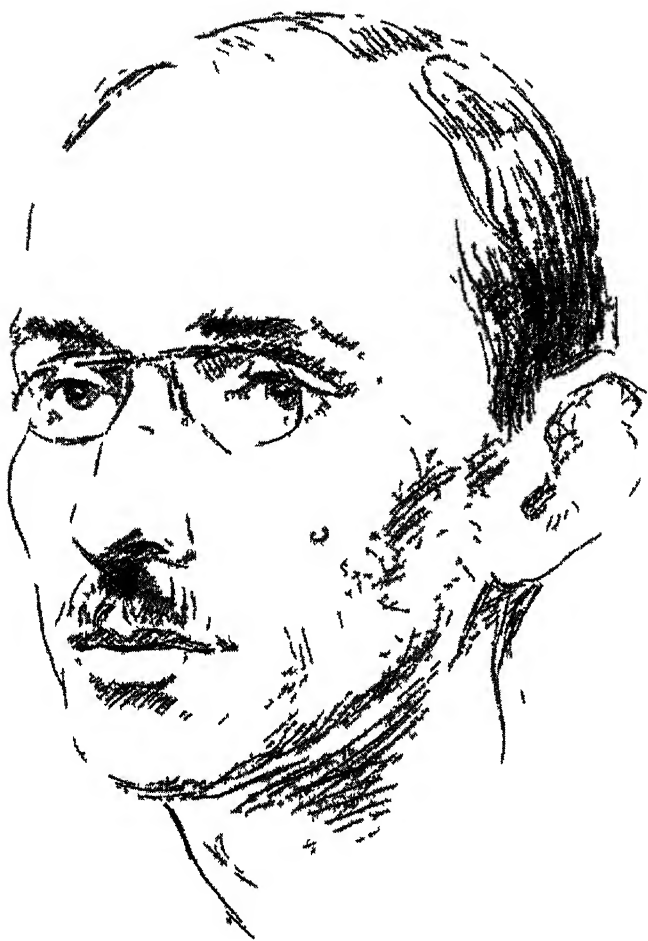
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Aide-de-Camp's Library

NO QUARREL WITH FATE



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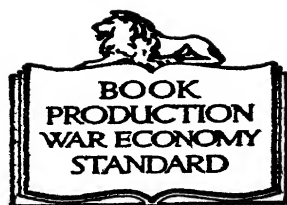
NO QUARREL WITH FATE

by

Kenneth Hare

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INVITATION TO BUSSAGE

To

JOHN GAWSWORTH

*Come, for like an amethyst,
Severn glides through purple mist,
Whence her landward sea-gulls fly,
Patterning the evening sky.
Now our beeches, fold on fold,
Tower in rust, and bronze, and gold;
In the wood the ivy-green
Keeps its burnish and its sheen,
And such blood-red berries stare
Nymphs may wreath for Bacchus' hair.
Come with talk a day to waste,
Gazing, 'twill be quickly past.
Then, a welcome presence, night;
With supper, and with candle-light,
And with generous burgundy,
From our pleasant inn hard by,
Where, an hostess of the best,
Fills the cup, and caps the jest.
Then to bed in no ill plight,
Happy to obey black Night.
You shall hear if the air be frore,
From my tallest sycamore,
The owl halloo, but with a note
Soft as the down upon her throat,
Or the brook with silver speech,
Glide beneath a sapling beech,
Drowsily self-communing;
Or the winds a tale shall bring
Of the uplands and the sheep,
Favouring, not thwarting sleep.
No town din your ear shall shock,
Only, at grey dawn, a cock
Will cry "Rouse!" some twice or thrice . . .
Bid him pocket his advice!*

NO QUARREL WITH FATE

It was at Alec Waugh's, and the conversation chanced to turn upon whether, if one had one's life again, one would choose to be a writer, or a man of action. Various views were advanced, and a sort of credit and debit account was conversationally drawn up. Such were the recompenses, such the drawbacks of this mode of life, or that other. It seemed to me that the choice was never in our hands, that our dispositions decided, over our heads as it were, to which group we were to belong.

In other circumstances, I might have *made* myself a sailor, when I hope I should have proved a creditable one, but I *was* a poet: of what magnitude it is not for me to say. Nature had made me that without my asking her. The question is one of individual "drive". At Oxford I would be complimented by my logic tutor who maintained—which astonished me—that I had a "logical mind". This made me feel vaguely dishonest, since it was uncongenial to me to act rigidly according to a pre-arranged plan. I suppose he meant that I had a hawk's eye for faulty reasoning, and that I grasped without difficulty the nature of the issues under debate.

Yet if I understand anything of myself, my motive forces have not been reason, but passion and imagination. It is normal to me to act first and think after. I do not fancy, however, that this trick of mind, temperament, or whatever it is, has ever led me far from the road I intended to pursue. Poets belong to the same natural order as carrier-pigeons, or the mariner's compass, which surely, rapidly, fulfil the purposes of their existences, without a "by your leave" to logic or philosophy.

It is natural to indulge in retrospect, and when I had left Alec's—with the dove-grey walls decorated with Nevisons, and the vistas, from the windows, of old elms, swaying spring-flowers, and the glint of water—I found myself continuing this mental process of appraisal of values.

How did I stand at the moment, with regard to life's scale of credits and debits? Health—so-and-so. Wealth—a rich man might smile! Perhaps the best item to the credit side is this, that fundamentally I do not desire anything altered. The

soul is an ocean, and content a pearl to be had for diving. But let me retrace the steps which have led me to this cottage on a Cotswold hill, and to a threequarter acre estate—a piece of England!—diversified by some noble trees, ash, chestnut, a witch-hazel, and a certain mighty sycamore whence, in winter twilights, an owl whom I have grown to look upon as a friend, emits his prolonged, flute-like “halloo-oo”!

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NO QUARREL WITH FATE.

CHAPTER I

FOREBEARS AND CHILDHOOD

OF immediate forebears, the outstanding personality is my father. Calf-bound volumes by the score in the library of his house at Twickenham, suggested that, when a boy at Merchant Taylors', he must have amassed prizes with the nonchalance of a croupier raking in bank-notes. At his school where he was scholar and exhibitor, he obtained the "Hody Exhibition" for Hebrew, and an open scholarship for Wadham, Oxford: the college of C. B. Fry, Sir John Simon, and the late Lord Birkenhead; and in former days, of Admiral Blake and Sir Christopher Wren. Although my father's approach to any subject was scientific, the scope of his interest was Elizabethan. He studied physics, mathematics and—in his last term—law. But these by no means excluded the Classics, optics, philology, chemistry, Oriental languages, and the Theory of Music. He achieved three "Firsts": in Mathematical Moderations; and in Mathematical and in Physical "Greats": a signal series of academic triumphs. Neither did he neglect athletics, but was five times in the winning crew of the College Fours.

From 1897 till 1920, my father was Principal of the Law Courts branch of the Treasury. Ours has been termed the "age of specialisation", and a specialist has been defined by a wit as "one who every day learns more and more about less and less". In this sense, nobody was less a specialist than my father, although he was scientist true-blue, could have philologised over Falstaff, and would not infrequently declare that "music was a branch of mathematics". He constructed a miniature organ, and persuaded a mute grandfather clock to play "God Save The King" at the hours and "Bonny Dundee" at the quarters. The scope of his interests suggests rather the Renaissance than the epoch of industry. This became evident when, in Boer War days, Alfred Nobel claimed that the Government had infringed a patent

for smokeless powder. The case went from the Court of Chancery to the Court of Appeal, and thence to the House of Lords.

My father's expert knowledge of chemistry enabled him to instruct the great lawyers in the technicalities of the processes of manufacture, and the Government won in all the courts. The Attorney-General—Sir Richard Webster, afterwards Lord Alvestone—wrote to the War Department: "The advice which I gave the Department that the conduct of the case should be entrusted to Mr. Hare has been more than justified by the result . . . The success is in no small degree due to his efforts. I am quite sure that you will agree with me that he should receive full credit for his invaluable services."

The case occupied two years, and no sooner was it over than Sir Hiram Maxim claimed that the Government had infringed *his* patent! Again my father proved himself invaluable, as being possessed of an expert's knowledge both of law and chemistry. This case, like the former, was carried through all three courts, and again the Government won the day. Some two and a half million pounds were at stake, so that nobody was more instrumental than my father in saving the unhappy tax-payer from this additional incubus.

He also gave the world the benefit of some new electrical and mechanical devices. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* refers to "Hare's book on the induction coil", in which my father describes a large induction coil which he constructed, the knowledge derived from which has been of sterling value to scientists. He also introduced new devices into a clock upon which he lectured to the Royal Society. This kept such faultless time that once, I remember, at the end of a six weeks' run, it proved to be but a fraction of a second from true time. The statue, "Out In The Fields"—a gracious piece of realism by A. G. Atkinson—was presented by my father to Kew Gardens.

My Uncle Evan—if the reader is not weary of forebears!—was of Westminster School, and St. John's College, Oxford. He translated from the German, Puschmann's, *The History of Medical Education*. Born in 1851, he was one of the surgeons sent out by Sir E. Letchmere's committee to the war between Serbia and Turkey. He distinguished himself by operating under dangerous conditions, and was decorated by King Milan with the Gold Medal for Valour. I have seen in *The Lancet*, an account submitted, it was claimed, by an eyewitness, which extolled in unqualified terms, my uncle's coolness in the face of danger.

While he and another young fellow, a student from Guy's, were employed as surgeons by the Serbs, a sudden advance of Turkish irregular troops, the "Bashibazouks", threw the Serbs, with whom he was then employed, into a panic. These Bashibazouks had the reputation of mutilating prisoners. Some few Serbs yet lingered in my uncle's vicinity. A Serb general, seeing no possibility of rallying the men, rode up, and that he might be better understood, cried in French: "Retirez vous, Messieurs!"

Retreat had been given official sanction. My uncle and the Guy's student remained. Uncle Evan amputated his wounded soldier's leg, and having finished the job with scientific thoroughness, set off for a farm whence he reappeared with a wheelbarrow, in which he placed his charge, and proceeded to wheel him away. Thus occupied, he was surprised by the enemy. They treated him with respect. My uncle was also employed in the Zulu War of 1879, and was dangerously ill from fever in Natal. He possessed campaign medals, and one for valour. With my father's sister, my Aunt Amy, I felt sympathetic affinities, since I shared her love of history and antiquities. She wrote a manuscript *History of Putney*, in a copper-plate style of handwriting, as perfect as that one sees on the visiting-cards.

An artist, Biggs—one of the first members of the Royal Academy, founded in 1768—married a Church, my mother's maiden name, and her family inherited many of his pictures. Biggs was a portraitist of high merit. Sometimes he painted compositions with figures in landscapes, of which some are vitiated by sentimentality. Many, however, are not, and in the latter category, one may mention "*The Goose Girl*": a thing of idyllic beauty. I remember the Aunt who had inherited many of his portraits telling me to stand beneath one of some late eighteenth-century ancestor of hers in a blue coat, when, with one accord, her guests burst out laughing.

"He's the image of Ken," somebody declared, "he's even going bald in the same way!" This did not please me at all, for a trace of baldness about the temples was beginning slightly to manifest itself even as a preparatory schoolboy, and I was sensitive about it. I only recall one fragment of my aunt's conversation. I had mentioned hypnotism which was then being accorded much attention in the press.

"It may be very clever, my dear Ken: but it all springs from the Devil!"

She was authoritarian: but a dear!

The maternal grandfather, her father, I never saw. An engineer, he made a fortune by foreseeing that gas would oust oil, at a time when others were timidly reserving their judgement. His eldest son, my uncle, wore those moustaches with pointed ends which to-day are displayed exclusively by sergeant-majors who served in the South African war. In those days, however, they were fashionable: and *dashing*! And if you doubt it, recall, I beg of you, the tactics of the Rabbit, as disclosed by a spirited disciple of Mother Goose.

Bunny's away to a sweet Bune
He's gone to her burrow: he'll stay to tea!
He's waxed his moustache like a gentleman;
He's determined to win her if he can!

My maternal uncles were connoisseurs in wine and food. The elder claimed to be able to recognise blindfold *any* brand of champagne upon the market. His gift was viewed askance by the more rigid members of my family who thought it, "nothing to be proud of". With which dictum I disassociate myself. A gourmet's palate is as sensitive to flavour, as a painter's eye to colour; why expect him to refrain from cultivating it? A man is not in the full sense a man who lacks the aesthetic of taste. And why anyway starve one of the senses; we have only five!

I was born in 1888, the year *after* the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, and *before* the death of Robert Browning. My recollections go back to my third year. I remember a younger brother being nursed. The bars of my cot present themselves to me as semi-animate objects. The brass knobs which surmount them have gnome-like personalities. The one with the dent in it is the most gnome-like of all. I recall the patterns of the nursery wallpaper—National Gallery of infancy!—but one of the designs stands out more vividly than all the rest; it represents a boy on a bicycle. On he comes, scorching down the road, to the left of a clump of bulrushes. My younger brother wakes suddenly from a nightmare. "That face on the wallpaper," he cries, "is larger than it was: and it's *alive*!"

When objects o' nights displayed a tendency to metamorphose themselves into monstrous semblances, my brother and I would take joint action, stalk through the gloom, and throw down those dressing-gowns or what not, which would peak themselves into the semblances of cowed monks, or adopt shapes which favoured

the illusion that there were bears about. This required resolution. We live in the here and now, but our emotional reactions belong to the elemental world. As well talk of modern summer and winter, as the modern child!

I was imaginative. It has been said that history can only be satisfactorily studied by those who can shut their eyes, and watch the men of the past, as they walk and converse in their own streets. Something of this trick I always had. It was both a blessing, and a curse. As nursery rhymes are more commonly than not, cruel, I derived little but pain from them. I loathed the little wretch who drowned "poor pussy cat", pitied the "Piper's son" flogged, and "roaring down the street", and suffered agonies when the nurse read to us the pretty fairy-tale of "Rumpelstilzkin".

*"To-day I brew, to-morrow bake,
And then the child away I take.
She ne'er will guess, my royal dame,
That 'Rumpelstilzkin' is my name!"*

It was not the verse, but the climax that terrified me. The Dwarf's design is frustrated, for his quaint, malicious ditty is overheard by an eavesdropping servant-girl who repeats it to the Princess. Admonished beforehand, the "Royal dame" has no difficulty in defeating her challenger.

When he realises that he has been tricked, the pigmy is possessed by so ungovernable a passion of rage, that he seizes his right ankle in his right hand, his left in his left, and tears himself in two!

Very small children have no insight into irony, no apprehension of the ludicrous. I saw the grisly business with the mental eye, with as much horror as though I were witnessing a public execution in the Middle Ages. So the moment the nurse would announce: "Now I'll read you 'Rumpelstilzkin'," I would climb down from my child's high chair—with the bar before it to prevent one falling out, and the tray upon which to stand a meal—and proceed to push it into the farthest corner of the room. I would be away from the fire, but better shiver with cold than horror.

"Oh, you're sulky, you are!" was the girl's unfailing comment, and the reading would proceed. She was no psychologist.

I was almost four when a little Spanish girl, the daughter of one of our neighbours, asked if I would let her "play nurse with

me?" In a month, she would be five. She was not therefore very strong, and she let me drop over the banisters! My leg was broken.

When I had recovered, my real nurse would "take me walks", as part of the nursery routine. Upon the Macadamised irregularities of those late-Victorian roads, sparrows and pigeons took unperturbed repasts. It was seldom long before we encountered a policeman. Amorous glances would be exchanged between this stout fellow and Nurse. And then she would say, "Here, take this boy and lock him up, will you? He's not been good." These threats would be negated by the "officer's" winking at me. Cupid, yes; but men must stick together! I remember a foreign lady passing our group in company with some gentleman from her own country, observing the policeman with such amusement as one commonly displays before some outlandish curiosity in a museum, and commenting: "Look at the absurd strap on his leep! Every time 'ee want a dreenk, 'e must leeft *dat* out of de way!" "*Every* time——!" She struck the note of the age; it was Bacchic! "Tommies", policemen, navvies, draymen, porters, driver of hansom or growler, all were beer-drinkers. Better perhaps that they should exchange their own ideas in pubs, than subject themselves to those of others in the modern cinemas. In the pubs they learned to think for themselves, in contact with their fellows. The influence of the pub was beneficent, civilizing.

"Oughtn't you to get into the pram, Master Ken? Haven't you been walking long enough?"

"I'm not tired, Nannie."

Was my restraint stoicism? I like to think so, but then it is a human foible to interpret one's own actions for the best.

Grown-ups often smile at the way children talk before them, as though they couldn't hear what was said. But grown-ups behave in exactly the same way before children. A near relative of my mother had called at tea-time, with her husband and their baby girl. If they were to stay to dinner, it would mean their passing the night with us.

"But why not?"

"Shan't we be an awful nuisance?"

"There's no nuisance about it. We'll only have to have a bed made up for one of them in the day nursery—he'll be perfectly comfortable there—and Joan" (I'll call her Joan) "can sleep in the night-nursery with the babies." My mother turned to my father, "That will be all right, won't it?"

"I certainly see no objection. After all they *are* babies."

"So that's settled, dear."

I must have been very young indeed, for I remember my younger brother having his evening meal of soup.

"You can crumble some potato into it; that won't do him any harm."

I heard this colloquy with excitement. So I was to see this pretty child in the nursery, undisturbed by those bores, grown-ups! The longed-for moment arrived at last. My younger brother had already been put to bed, and was asleep in his cot by the wall. Nannie brought in Joan.

"Don't stare so!"

No use to talk to me! Oh, she was pretty! I gazed as though hypnotised.

"Don't stare so, you rude boy!"

But I wanted to see her with her clothes off, not that I had any premonition about the so-called 'facts of life', but I was goaded by my young male curiosity as to whatever concerns those fellow humans who, while they resemble us in some ways, yet belong so obviously to a different order of creatures.

"Don't you know it's rude to stare? I'm ashamed of you, Master Ken! You'll be making this little girl feel quite uncomfortable!"

I looked closer at this but could perceive no symptom of the remotest embarrassment over my inquisitive adoration. Far from it, she was smiling. Nurse set the child down. Then taking me by the shoulders, turned me with my face to a chest of drawers at the other side of the room.

"Here, stare at that, if you want to stare; and if you stare hard enough, and long enough, something very funny—a bird!—is going to come out of one of them drawers!" Child though I was, I was not finessed. This was the first occasion on which I experienced delight in the proximity of a pretty woman!

.

I was sensitive to colour effects as a very small child, and to colour I still owe no small part of the pleasure life gives me. Above all to the colours that one finds in Nature, and to those of the great Italian and Flemish masters of painting. I would watch the light between the long strips of the Venetian blinds of my bedroom window, to divine, as by its appearance as of gold or silver, whether the day promised to be sunny or the

reverse. In winter evenings, there was joy unutterable in the appearance of the lamp-lighter! Long and patiently would I wait in ambush for the first glimpse of him from the nursery window; or rather for the first sight of the spark he carried, for he himself would be invisible in the mist. First one saw his spark, then himself, in his decayed hat, and flapping coat, carrying the pole—seen or unseen this, in the Thames Valley dusk—but sustaining always the spark! On he came with a brisk and busy tread. There would be a pause beneath the street-lamp. The spark flew upwards! And a yellow star was born into the night!

Once I burst into tears and was shaken by a fit of sobbing, so profoundly was I affected by the beauty of the miracle that I had witnessed, and by the thought of the long hours to be lived through, before I should witness it again!

I remember one winter when the Thames froze, and street urchins sold water, which they had carried long distances, at fourpence a bucket; for all the pipes were frozen. We had an ice-breaker on the London side of the old Georgian bridge at Richmond. What a pity to break the ice, and ruin the slides!

Even to watching the flies, in summer, I owed, as a child, considerable pleasure. Many were the devices they employed in the kitchen, to combat the pest, but to me these creatures possessed something of suavity which I find impossible to express. Under the chandelier of naked gas-jets, for we had no mantles as yet, the flies disported themselves, interweaving their ever shifting maze. It was fascination to single out some particular member of the troupe, and follow him with the eye as long as possible. It never was for long.

Never was the community of flies more enchanting than when a sudden shaft of sunlight fired the tiny bodies and glittering wings! How they flew, beneath the gas-discoloured patch upon the white of the kitchen ceiling, like disembodied sparks!

¶ Servants sustain an important rôle in the lives of small children. They relieve the nurse, when her charges tease her beyond endurance. *Beetles* were never, nor will be, poetic. I remember watching one of that odious crew climbing unperceived up the well-starched apron of Elizabeth, a cook and a philosopher. Up, up it climbed, till now it stood, unperceived by her, upon her white collar. I was fascinated, I was dumb, I could *not* give warning. Suddenly the beetle lost its balance! It was gone!

"Elizabeth!" I cried in horror, "a beetle has fallen down your neck!"

"Well?" said she, "it went there of its own accord, didn't it? Then there it's got to stay!"

"To stand or fall

Free in thine own arbitrament it lies",

so Raphael judged of Adam.

Elizabeth had endless patience with animals. She trained the tortoises to come to lunch when they heard the gong. The lawn would appear empty of visible life. Then a prolonged booming would fill the air. As it died away, one was aware of a rustle. Suddenly one beheld the tortoises, and realised that, in spite of their proverbial slowness, they can, upon occasion, travel at speed. In a trice, the kitchen door would be reached, when a bowl of garden peas would be their reward.

Many were the interesting friends who looked in to visit my father upon a Sunday. There was Sir George Stuart Robertson, F.S.A., K.C. At Oxford he had acquired honours of all descriptions, including the coveted "Craven", and the "Ireland", a couple of "Firsts" in Honours schools, the Chancellor's Prize for Latin prose, and the Gainsford for Greek prose and verse. He threw the hammer for Oxford against Cambridge, and won for three successive years! He also threw it for Oxford against Yale, and for the London Athletic Club, against the New York Athletic Club. His most romantic achievements were the throwing of the "discus" at the Olympic Games, when these were held in Athens, and his recitation of his Greek Ode. There, in the very city of Aeschylus, he had publicly recited a Greek poem of his own composition—so I learned from my elders—and had been awarded, by the King of the Hellenes himself, a wreath of bay.

Another frequent visitor was Sir Herbert Jackson, K.B.E., F.R.S., a professor of organic chemistry, and a radiologist. He too was a man possessed of strength above the ordinary. I remember his arriving, one day, with a huge leather bag containing iron retort stands which, without the faintest perceptible symptom of fatigue, he was conveying from one laboratory to another. At Richmond station, after the fashion of that day, a youth dashed up with a "Carry your bag, Sir?"

"Yes," Sir Herbert answered, "if you can lift it!"

With every mark of confidence, the lad addressed himself to

the task, but at the end of a minute or so, he realised that his patron was laughing. The bag remained where the great man had set it down. The youth shook his head, the Professor gave him a tip, and resumed possession of his property.

The scope of his interests almost equalled my father's. Besides chemistry and radiology, his experiments in the making of optical and thirty other kinds of glass were crowned with success. He was a member of the "Epicurean" club, where savants who appreciate cooking as an art meet and dine. He knew *As You Like It* by heart, and in his youth had fought eight rounds with 'Kid' McCoy!

Another of these academic necromancers was Dr. Jevons. As a child I maintained that he was my godfather, but my elder brother likewise put in a claim for him.

"Which is the godson?" he would enquire, with divine artlessness. Then my mother would reply, "Why, Maurice!" And I would counter with an indignant, "Not at all! Don't you remember, Doctor?"

Final truth was never established, so we both received tips!

As an undergraduate of the college to which my father later sent me, Wadham, the future philosopher's first act was to instal in his rooms an Homeric barrel of beer. Reports of jovial parties reached the Warden's ears, and rendered him uneasy.

"I understand, Mr. Jevons, you have a particularly large barrel of beer in your rooms; is this necessary?"

"Yes, for my health, Sir."

"And do you find your health improving in consequence of this barrel of beer?"

"Yes, Sir. A week ago I couldn't shift it. Now I can carry it round the room!"

At Durham University, to which he migrated with a "Litt. D.", Honours of the First Class in Classical Moderations, and "Greats", etc., he enjoyed a variety of posts of distinction, amongst them, Classical Tutor, University Treasurer, Master of Hatfield College, and Vice-Chancellor of the University.

His intellectual interest included prehistorics, evolution, comparative religion, philosophy—of which he wrote a book—Greek antiquities, and Greek democracy. Of philosophy he became a professor; of his *Idea of God in Early Religions*, an Italian and Spanish translation was required. His *A History of Greek Literature* ran rapidly through three editions, being regarded as a classic in his own lifetime.

A friend remarking casually that he had just attended "a lecture by the 'godfather'," I enquired the subject. "Japanese magic" was the answer! But perhaps he was confusing him with his brother Stanley, another learned Behemotus, who was well acquainted with Japan and the China coast.

When upon coast defence in 1915, I strained my heart. There was no graduated system of physical training in those days, and route marches by day, followed by tactical exercises by night, became, upon the sudden, the routine of young fellows who, but a short while previously, had sat the day through at office desks and only travelled to their work by train or bus. I was temporarily transferred to the reserve, and while waiting my recall to the service, obtained the sub-editorship of *Colour*, then in its first flush, under the editorship of Mr. A. W. Barrett, son of the author of that once popular melodrama, the *Silver King*.

Dr. Jevons took note of my work, and wrote four or five letters of the most cordial appreciation.

Of my narrative poem, "Peter Paul Rubens", printed later in the collection entitled *New Poems* (Benn), he wrote: "This is the best yet, but to say that is to give relative praise, where absolute is called for. This is not merely the best: it is something better—it is good absolutely."

Elsewhere he writes, "If I venture to say how the good there is in "Peter Paul Rubens" gleams on me, you may be interested. Duly, in self-defence, I must preface that I know a diamond has many facets, even though it is but of one or two that I happen to see the scintillations. What flashes most brightly on the eye is the opening passage—the first thirty-four lines. You have got colour into it, as rich as Rubens' own, and the definition of all the outlines is—Dutch. I should not have thought it possible for the pen to do the brush's own work better than the brush itself, but that I believe poetry to be the most consummate of all the arts. What delights me in the exordium is this: whereas the eye travels over a canvas with great rapidity and speedily pieces the separate impressions into a whole, the ear receives its impressions much more slowly; consequently, in a passage as long as your exordium, the earlier impressions usually fade a good deal before the later ones are made; but you have made the earlier impressions so vivid that they are not lost when the later ones come; and I do not remember another word picture on so large a scale in which the total effect is produced and preserved so effectively."

One characteristic of greatness is the ability to praise.

Another recollection is less gratifying. When an undergraduate, long before the days of "Peter Paul Rubens", on arising one morning, I found a visiting-card on my table. I summoned my scout.

"Williams!"

"Sir?"

"How did this card get here? It wasn't here, I'll swear, when I turned in last night!"

"Wasn't it, Sir? Well, *no*, Sir. Fact is, the gentleman left it here only half an hour ago, Sir."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You were in bed, and I didn't like to wake you."

"But Heavens alive! This is Dr. Jevons' card! Did he leave a message: say anything?"

"He tried to, Sir!"

"Good Lord! Williams, what happened?"

"I thought he was a dun, Sir; so I had him out of here quick!"

I continue my narrative of my earliest days. Having been taught the alphabet, a regular governess was engaged. She was a giant at mental arithmetic, and, although doubtless well-meaning enough, almost a total fool at everything else. Her method was unvarying. Within the first five minutes—not now and again, but normally, as a matter of routine—an imposition would be set. It would be, "write out this, that or the other, a hundred times". It taught us nothing. It was a strain upon the eyesight. It was ruinous to the handwriting. It was as profitless as picking oakum. It had the advantage however for her, that it enabled her to relapse into her native vacuity. Only with mental arithmetic did she come to intellectual life. She would add the numbers of the hymns, displayed upon the notice-board in church on a Sunday, or she would add three rows together, and multiply by the fourth. Or she would subtract the fourth row from the sum-total of the remaining three. She could do as many tricks with figures as a monkey with a ball of string; but that did not help a poet to develop. Besides, she could not read the most puerile novel without a small dictionary on her knee to seek common English words, which were so much Hebrew to her. And having read a paragraph or two, she would lock the book up against herself, for novels were wicked!

She also taught us music: which I should have loved to have

known something about. Unfortunately, she couldn't even play "God Save The King" with one finger! Here, too, she had a system. She gave us "Theory". This consisted of copying notes from a score on to a slate. How these notes would sound, were anybody to play them, we knew no more than the cat; no more than she did herself! We copied them, as one might copy the Chinese characters inscribed upon a tin of tea.

Once she took me up to town, to purchase a pair of shoes. Being ignorant of London, we lunched at a most expensive hotel, where the waiter overcharged her, and then demanded a tip.

"You have already taken that!" she answered.

He couldn't Jew our lightning calculator upon the bill!

My parents were nettled at her taking the child to a hostelry both fashionable and expensive. Irritation which I unintentionally augmented by praising the celery, which did not figure as an item upon our nursery bills of fare, and by artlessly extolling the politeness of the waiter, as he thrust himself forward to help myself into my coat. But my father smiled at the Governess's retort! After all, she was there to amuse him with arithmetical tricks. I don't fancy the question, "Can she teach the children anything?" was ever asked!

The first author I ever read was Shakespeare, the first play, *Hamlet*. I was still so young that when, on glancing ahead, I caught sight of the stage direction, *Enter Ghost*, I closed the volume with a beating heart! From that moment I dared not read when quite alone, yet I feared that to do so when others were in the room would expose me to chaff, if not indeed, to active opposition. I therefore devised a plan for indulging in my fearful fascination without unduly harrowing my emotions.

When guests were expected to dinner, I would remove the volume surreptitiously and hide it in the nursery. When they had arrived, I would produce it; my younger brother would be asleep, the elder occupied a different room. As soon as the arrivals became animated, and I could hear laughter and conversation from downstairs, I began my reading. It gave me a sense of security, to feel the proximity of possible allies, should there be a case of "enter ghost" in sober reality! After *Hamlet*—pursuing always the same tactics—I read *Macbeth*, and, without effort, had those hair-raising ingredients of the Witches' infernal stew by heart:

'Gall of goat; and slips of yew
Silver'd in the moon's eclipse;'

Owing to my secretive manner of reading, I had almost finished Shakespeare before my studies were taken note of by my elders. Despite its poets, the prevailing temper of Victoria's reign was markedly anti-poetical. Exceptions to the general trend there were, and some whose names I have mentioned already figured in our circle, but these were the emancipated minds, the exceptions.

Science loved for its own sake by scientists, for its novelty by triflers, as a new religion by cranks, and for its sexlessness by Puritans, had come to be pretty generally regarded as the sole occupation worth the attention of men of intelligence. In my early days, further support had been given the Philistines by Sir W. S. Gilbert's absurd *Bunthorn*. A further ground for their anti-art and anti-life prejudices was given Puritans—or so they affected to think—by the upshot of the Oscar Wilde trial, which took place in 1895, when I was seven, and which was still darkly discussed.

It had been possible for the Elizabethans to derive their inspiration directly from their own age, even as Chaucer had done, and the Queen Anne men were to do. It was possible for Byron to draw inspiration from his own day. But the Victorians turned away from the prevailing drabness; Tennyson to the Arthurian myths, Browning to the Italy of the Renaissance, William Morris to a dream of the Middle Ages and to socialism—a fictitious yesterday, and a most undesirable to-morrow!—and Swinburne, that unique exponent of verbal music, to Ancient Greece.

The scientists were by no means disposed to share applause with artists, whose work their more factual training, and temperament made it impossible they should understand. A scientist uses words as tools by means of which he can make himself understood. Good: so does the poet. But a poet goes a great deal farther. He employs words not only to convey ideas with lucidity, but to produce effects of music, form, and colour; to arouse the passions; excite imagination. The scientist, then, employs words as scientific instruments; the poet as notes in a musical composition. This not only puzzles the scientist, but exasperates him. It is a very human foible to hate what we do not understand.

The Scientist was the medicine-man of my boyhood. A favourite slight thrown by such at poets in particular, and at artists generally, was this: "It's not *what* he says, but the *way*

he says it!" This was thought to be a damning censure felicitously conveyed. Yet apply this criterion to the facts, and let's see where it leads us. A child in the nursery draws a head of an old man. We recognise what he tries to represent; the dots are eyes; the lines eye-brows and a mouth and a nose; and the whole is surrounded with a vaguely circular containing line. "A man's head," we say, "good!" But Rembrandt and Velasquez also give us faces of men. "It's not what they say, but the way they say it!"

I am convinced that this jealousy which scientists cherished against artists, contributed hardly less than puritan bigotry, to that ferocity which characterised the attitude of Judge, Jury, and public alike, at the trial of unfortunate Oscar Wilde.

"Oscar Wilde was spoilt," I heard a scientist of my early days declare, "by being run after by a whole pack of silly women!"

When such are the hounds, we waive all objections to the hunt; but it was hard for our friend that Fate had not cast *him* for the rôle of fox!

CHAPTER II

BOYHOOD

I FORGET at just what early date I ferreted out *Tom Jones*, and other eighteenth-century novels, with the old steel-engravings, from a corner where they had been "top-shelved". Those ladies of the illustrations: an exaggerated décolletée characterised them all! Surprised at her toilet, her mirror would reveal the Exquisite approaching from behind her, and her *La! Sir, what would you with me?* expression. Gentlewomen were liable to be intruded upon whilst stepping into hip-baths, when a gesture of well-simulated bashfulness would provoke an elegant flourish from the Beau's three-cornered hat! One damsel went so far as to be overset from a coach—the turf was doubtless soft by the wayside—and revealed, in falling, charms which might have induced a statue to dive after! Crude technique? I am persuaded our three-bottle ancestors found it shattering! That breasts should be as firm and full as cannon-balls, would appear to have been the criterion of feminine beauty with the artists of that day. "Romance", they might have said, "goes out with bosoms; when bosoms return, it rushes back!"

How infinitely tedious, by comparison, were those pictures in which only men figured: shooting pheasants, or smoking pipes at ale-houses! But the Hogarthian damsels, while they assuredly did me no manner of harm, heightened my appreciation of the feminine anatomy, when my eye lighted upon it in real life. And this it did so often as there were guests to dinner, when I was in my fourteenth year, that of the Coronation of King Edward VII. For arbitrary fashion then decreed that "necks" should be as low, as skirts, in post-war days, were high. Edward the Peacemaker, must have been cognizant of as many secrets as Edward the Confessor! But I must not anticipate. Neither my elder brother nor I had, as yet, gone to a preparatory school; but we had reached the combative stage.

So countrified was our part of the world, which the bricks and mortar of an ever-expanding London has since engulfed, that from our top windows at St. Margaret's, we could watch the morning train leaving Twickenham. When it had left, the

time had come for my father to set off for St. Margaret's station, and we boys prized the permission to accompany him.

On one such occasion, we each carried half a broomstick, for we had sawn new ones in two for weapons, in "case of attack". On the return home, we provoked a superlative brawl, by brandishing our cudgels in the eyes of every boy we met.

In a corner of the garden, we had built a fort of packing-cases, roofed over with planks, and this was proof against missiles of whatever calibre. In admirable order, we retired upon our castle. Stones came showering over the walls, for the streets were Macadam, which favoured a plentiful supply of ammunition. We returned their fire, drawing upon the inexhaustible stores of coal and coke piled up in the coach-house.

The territory between our house and St. Margaret's station became our greenwood, and ourselves the Robin Hood's outlaws by whom it was beset. My parents, who did not realise that we were living in the reign of Richard Cœur de Lion, voted our quarter-staves inelegant, and they were not used again. The taboo was disconcerting, for our yeomanly activities had roused the ire of every young tough in the neighbourhood. But our ingenuity proved equal to the event. A garden hose having been discarded, we cut it up, utilising convenient lengths as weapons. We rolled it in coils, after the fashion of twist tobacco, and crammed a yard or so in either pocket, for boys are rarely covetous of sartorial distinction.

The numbers of the enemy increased steadily, for the fool Sheriff and his Nottingham crowd fancied us unarmed, and showed as much by their grinning. They hung upon our heels, and fancied that they had the bold outlaws at their mercy.

Having seen my father off (he having perceived nothing out of the ordinary, for he was interested, as he often averred, in "things not people", and was accustomed to work out mathematical problems in his head when walking), the fun began. The overconfidence of our foes betrayed them. We walked straight up to the ringleaders, and suddenly producing our rubber flails, slashed at their ears, noses, necks, or whatever else offered a momentarily convenient target. Their howls of rage and pain were well-nigh drowned by our triumphant hoots! They ducked, roared, and ran for it!

Tidings of conflict would be bruited about, and the old ladies of the neighbourhood would say, "It's a great pity those boys never had sisters!" We agreed.

In one battle we employed cavalry, to wit, a tricycle horse. Our dappled beauty was within an ace of capture—Lord! what a prize for the enemy—did indeed lose one glass-blue eye, but despite sticks and stones, we rescued both the cavalier, my brother Adrian, and his mount. Our attitude was that of the Plantagenet king of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, who, while the Holy Wars were nearing an end, looked forward to “fighting the Scots in peace and quietness!”

We made about this time, two Scots friends, Kenneth and Keith. They wore kilts, dirks, and bonnets adorned with topaz, which I assumed to be of the same inestimable quality as the stones which shine in the crowns of the sovereigns of England. But *why* did they not dress as *Englishmen*? This must be looked to!

“Why are you boys fighting!” cried my mother, beholding us in a heap on the nursery floor. My father suggested a “padded cell”, as more suitable than a nursery, adding, as his acute mind enabled him to visualise the reform from several angles, “with a drain for spilt tea in the middle, and with asbestos for wallpaper.”

To the question, “Why are you boys fighting?” the reply might have been another question: “Why do young kids, rams, and bulls butt?” Had anyone mistaking our motives suggested that we were not friends of the young Scots boys, I believe we should have fought *him*!

In the drama of our early existence, a French governess played a walk-on part. She walked on at lunch-time, and off at tea-time. “They are not children,” she cried, explosively, “they are leetle devils!” Funny! and I had thought her beautiful. Had she divined how more than humanly beautiful I thought her, she might have reconsidered the position and stayed on with us until—well—dinner-time!

I remember a children’s party where I broke my arm, turning cart-wheels. And another at which an old fellow who was jocularly appealed to for a song, responded with,

“Champagne Charlie is my name, Boys;
Knocking down Bobbies is my game, Boys!”

As “Bobby” was Victorian slang—Robert Peel was contemporary with the Queen—the song in question is perhaps not, after all, so very old. But that touch about the “knocking down” surely harked back in spirit to an earlier day.

When a man assures one he has lived before, what has happened, I fancy, is this. He saw, when a child, a person or place

which impressed him, and in later life, some other person or place which possessed a resemblance to it. As he cannot recall the circumstances of the prototype of his childhood, he now believes that what stirs his emotions is a state of prae-existence. And well can I understand it! For when I reflect that I once heard an old gentleman sing a song about knocking down policemen, it is as though I had looked in at Tom Cribb's parlour, or conversed with the Prince Regent!

On Sundays we would often lunch with my Grandfather who lived to be ninety-two, and died in 1918, when I was attached, as liaison officer, to the Carabiniers Belges, at Ypres. He wore a "choker", and drank toasts: the latter, I mean, in the old formal manner. His impeccably laundered neck-cloth, drawn through a platinum ring set with a solitaire diamond, gave him, for me, such distinction as attaches to a portrait by Gainsborough. He would fill his glass of champagne and bowing to his guest, would say: "My dear"—and there would follow family nick-name or affectionate diminutive—"my love to you!" Neither were "The King", nor "Absent Friends" forgotten. The ceremony was charming, and devoid of the faintest trace of self-consciousness. It always had been done; he did it. The element of speed in modern life, except in formal banquets, has banished "toasts", together with a thousand amenities more whose passing I regret.

To-day a fellow flies from London to Rome: from Rome to London. What are his impressions? He informs interviewers that he broke the record for speed; or that he sustained life, during the flight, upon meat-jubes, or boricated milk! Marco Polo makes gayer reading! And speed has killed conversation, that solid talk amongst men, with the opportunities it offered for sparkling sally, and quick return; that leisured converse upon which Addison founded his flawless prose; the tradition which Wilde inherited. The witty, unembarrassed interchange of ideas was an integral part of life at Oxford in the horse-tram days.

Men are known by their apophthegms. One of my Grandfather's was, "Whatever an Englishman intends to do, that he *can* do!" which to-day most will regard as jingoistic. For my part, I think it shows an infinitely manlier outlook than that entertained by the "Reds" and "Pinks" of to-day. Are we to rely upon our own souls, when the pinch comes, or on the State? Are we to be free men, or robots? The history of England is that of great individuals; they not bureaux, not committees, not the State,

have made the name of Englishman*respected in the remotest parts of the world.

My grandfather had dined at houses where Thackeray, Macready—the Shakespearian actor whose Richard III was held his superlative triumph—Robert Browning, and Charles Dickens were, at one time or another, fellow guests.

“Macready was a *wonderful* Shakespearian actor, Ken dear!”

“What was Robert Browning like, Grandfather?”

The reply was unexpected: “He was a tremendous trencherman! He ate till he could eat no more; then flung himself back in his chair and mopped his head with his napkin!” This amused me immensely. It bore out to a certain extent what Watts Duntón was to tell me later. “For two successive years, Robert Browning never once dined at home, and he began to be regarded by the majority of his contemporaries, rather as a diner-out than as a genius in letters.”

My paternal grandmother, whom I never saw, as an occasional help to the domestic staff, gave employment to an aged sempstress; and my aunt remembered this woman asking her, “if she read the writings of ‘Mr. Dickisson’?” My aunt put this forward as an extraordinary example of Charles Dickens’ popularity, that even this illiterate old dame should at least be aware that he existed. It was a good example, at any rate, of the inhibition the vulgar rest under which prevents them ever pronouncing correctly the names of the eminent. I cannot recall my grandfather ever speaking of Dickens. It was therefore to my younger brother Adrian that I applied, to satisfy my curiosity on this head.

“But didn’t Grandfather ever tell you what he thought of him? I suppose you asked him?”

“Oh, yes; but when I asked him about Dickens, he only said, ‘Now Thackeray was charming!’”

That was like my grandfather. He never expressed dislike. When he disapproved, he kept silent. His strongest word of condemnation was “rascal”. Had a man murdered his entire family, if pressed for his views of the criminal, my grandfather would have gone no farther than, “I suspect he was a rascal.”

Thoughts of my grandfather, and of some of the sterling men I associate with my father—men not without prejudices, but absolutely incorruptible, and possessed of good heads and stout hearts—rushed in upon me the other day, by the law of contrast, as fragments of the peroration of a communist agitator I was passing, were borne to me on the breeze. He was an undersized

little rat of a man, with a bouncing manner, a greasy complexion, and an accent derived from foreign extraction and from adenoids.

"The 'Old School Tie': we don't want no more of *that*! Gromwell—*there* was a soldier!—he made rings round the Old School Tie shentlemen! We want a Gromwell to-day! I'm Brittidge myself, but I've no use whatever for the Brittidge ruling glasses!" . . .

Like all children, I loved picture-books. I remember my grandfather, one Sunday afternoon, producing a portfolio of etchings and engravings, some of which were in colour, and bidding us children choose. You know the sort of thing: "A Prospect of Sion House from the Thames," "The Old Palace at Kensington," "The South Aspect of the Seat of Tobias McGumph, Esq.," with his Lady carrying a Lap-Dog, and Footman a Bottle. "The Virgin After Raphael . . ."

"Look what Ken's chosen," cries my grandfather, "old Bacon!" He and my aunt smiled, but nobody else. The Muses were suspicious companions. And then, how would this grim-visaged old Elizabethan, in his high-crowned hat, look upon the nursery screen? How would he harmonise with the Postman delivering the letter, and the little girl with her hair down, endeavouring to tempt the pug-dog to eat an orange? In case I should regret my choice of Bacon, my grandfather gave me an additional picture, a coloured engraving of the Thames from which three beaver-hatted gentlemen with a net, were attempting to remove the fish.

But I had read Bacon's "Essays", and loved them, and though my knowledge of life was negligible, revelled in the verbal music and, enjoying a good memory, had many passages by heart. "But little do men perceive what solitude is, and how far it extendeth; for a crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal where there is no love." *That* truth, at least, I could appreciate, for I was a lonely child, and there was no soul to whom I could open my heart. And I was lonely from never being alone.

To be sometimes alone: that seems to me, in retrospect, to have been a main preoccupation of my childhood. The problem never seemed to present itself to my brothers. They were as content as the leaves upon a tree, never to quit it. It was so simple for grown-ups. "Now run away, you Boys, all of you; your father wishes to be alone!" One evening, I remember,

the talk had turned upon the atrocities attributed to the British by foreign propagandists. This was at the outset of the war in South Africa. I was not at this time a child, eleven if not older, but this seems as good a place as another, to give an example of the sort of thing I have in mind. I went to bed with this talk of atrocities in my thoughts. At breakfast the following morning, in the presence of all of us including an aunt and uncle who had put up with us for the night, in the tone which a music-hall comedian adopts when he burlesques a child's voice, my father said: "Don't train ve naval gun on ve hospital!" The laugh was general, and they all looked at me.

"What is the joke?" I asked.

"*That's* what you were saying in your sleep," says my mother, "when we looked into your room last night."

Even in my dreams then I was not alone! My mother had headed a procession, and they had all come upstairs to look at "the boy" asleep, as they might at a sea-lion, or the freaks at a fair! I cannot express my sense of shock and mortification. No wonder if children grow up with complexes!—To return to earlier days.

I never wearied of asking my genial grandfather about that strange London of his own boyhood. Wandering in the City once, as a young fellow, he had found himself upon the skirts of the mob who were watching a public execution. The "Jack Ketch" of the moment—"They were all called, 'Jack Ketch', Ken dear,"—thrust his hands up through the trap-door, caught the dangling man by his ankles, and dragged his neck down tighter into the noose! An imaginative boy, this spectacle had made my grandfather feel sick all the rest of that day, and had haunted his dreams for many nights after.

Merrier were his bacchic recollections. "A decanter of port formed part of the office furniture of every firm which possessed any self-respect. The moment one entered the room, a glass would be filled and passed one, precisely as the young fellows of to-day pass a cigarette-case."

The port-drinking did my grandfather no manner of harm. He died at the advanced age of ninety-two, and then only as the result of a broken thigh-bone which resulted from his slipping upon a loose mat, on a shiny parquetry floor. His father died at ninety-four of old age; and he read *The Times* before falling asleep for the last time. Physical exercise provides the clue to the mystery. If the men of those generations drank port by the pint,

they also walked like postmen. When my grandfather was himself in the nursery, only *twelve* cabs, of the Hansom variety, were allowed to be licensed! Twenty years after Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, the "London General Omnibus Company" possessed a *total* of only five hundred and ninety-five of their popular conveyances!

The cab to which enterprising Mr. Hansom gave his name was a singular innovation. This many-sided man—the architect of Birmingham Town Hall—took out his patent for an improved two-wheeled "safety-cab". "Safety" was the word! The older cabs had swayed like rocking-horses, and those adventurers who travelled in them, were liable to be thrown out: upon their backs or faces as chance should direct. All this, of course, was in my grandfather's very young days. Lack of transport never troubled him. During his business life, if the weather were sunny, he would be up at six in the morning, and row by water from Putney to the City, whence a waterman would row the boat back to be in readiness for his use upon the morning following.

The old man was tough as he was kind: *id pulchrum, id Romanum*. When he was already in his sixtieth year, a cat-burglar swarmed up a stack-pipe, and nearly succeeded in entering his bedroom window. Not quite however! The spirited old man was upon him in an instant, thrust him down, and seized all that he could obtain of him: his hat! This, next morning, he handed over to the police.

"Oh, Grandfather, did it give them a clue?"

"No, Ken, dear,"—smiling—"he had neglected to write his name in it."

Chops and steaks, in his early days, were the staple of all except gourmets. This was so in the City, and in Westminster where he had a club. To-day these dishes have almost ceased to be regarded as national *par excellence*. When I last visited the immortal city, the Cook at Christchurch, Oxford, assured me that he had "almost ceased to cook steaks; there was no demand for them." A "chop of meat", one recalls, had been the standard luncheon dish of Addison and Steele. "Plain living and high thinking" writes Puritan Wordsworth, and the connection between genius and a poached egg may have seemed clear to that metaphysical mind. For my part, give me imagination in cooking. In those days, I should have felt chop-ridden.

Yet we have receded rather than advanced for, with the rise to power of the Calvinistic lower middle classes, we have taxed wine

almost out of existence. We are in danger of forgetting that, as my valued friend André Simon reminds us, "From Chaucer, the son of a royal butler, to Ruskin, the son and grandson of wine merchants, every poet, dramatist, artist and writer of genius, every great thinker has been a wine-drinker."

It is curious to reflect that the tradition of "Jerry" Abershaw, the Highwayman, was still very much alive in my childish days. This desperado came late upon the bustling scene. He missed the nineteenth century by only five years, being executed at the mature age of twenty-two. A dozen years later, natural philosophers were experimenting with *gas*, stuff which burned—Oh, horror!—without wick or visible fuel! Gas was to put a spoke in the wheel of all those Abershaws: to stare down alleys, and peer through the windows of London's underworld, and reveal the doings of the fine gentlemen who had their habitations therein. Despite captious moralists, stories of highwaymen may be excellent for boys. They see the intrepidity without the villainy.

Many anecdotes of "Jerry" have found their way into the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Here is one of my grandfather's, the truth of which I have no reason to doubt, which has not. Our friend Louis Jeremiah Abershaw cut the traces of a coach which was travelling across Wimbledon Common, and robbed its passengers. The practice of the day was to gallop immediately from the scene, with a view to putting the maximum distance between robbed and robber, before the hue and cry could be raised: The coach has been robbed! An exquisitely attired young fellow composedly enters an ale-house in the immediate vicinity of the crime. His pockets jingle with his golden gains. The bar is crowded. He throws a guinea upon the counter, and calls for, "Drinks round!"

"Whose health shall we drink, Sir?" they ask the exquisite.

"'Jerry' Abershaw," is the cool reply. His name at this time was a by-word on the road! The times were not democratic, and if one were a "gentleman", and could afford to, one dressed the part. "Jerry" went to the gallows trim as a rose, and with a rose dangling from his mouth. . . .

I still had to contrive myself a "priest's hole", if I were to read undisturbed. But my grandfather was sympathetic. He sent me the "Plays" in a box the top of which could be thrown back, while the front let down something after the fashion of a doll's house.

"So *here* you are!" cries my mother bursting into my bedroom—I was not then in the "priest's hole"—"your father is very annoyed at your *sulking* here all by yourself!"

Which meant that my mother was, for with my father, it was "out of sight", and "out of mind". She had come upon me reading *King Lear*, and was at the point where Kent is sitting in the stocks. The moon rises.

Approach, thou beacon to this under globe,
That by thy comfortable beams I may
Peruse this letter!—Nothing, almost, sees miracles
But misery:

I returned with my mother to the drawing-room.

"What are you reading?" my father asked me. He too only wished to be left alone. "Oh! *King Lear*? Very *dull*, isn't it?"

His own range of interests was of the broadest, could he but have been content with, "the space which he himself filled".

The scene of *Paradise Lost* is the Universe; that of *King Lear* is this little island of England: and the south part only of that. Yet such is Shakespeare's emotional intensity, that he appears to depict his drama upon a larger canvas; and so penetrating and universal is the scope of his sympathies, that tortured humanity recognises its lineaments more surely in *Lear*, than in Milton's *Adam*.

I recall asking my mother the name of some flower from the garden.

"Don't tell him," cries my father, between chaff and earnest, "he only wants to put it in a poem!"

Sometimes when I supposed I was alone and about to enjoy my hard won privacy, my mother would burst suddenly into the room, crying, "Does the Muse flow?"

Perhaps I was one of those boys who "cannot take chaff", but I confess to having found exasperating, this shattering trick which was of repeated recurrence. When I married, my mother informed my wife, "I have tried all my life to stop Kenneth writing poetry, but I haven't managed it. Perhaps as his wife, you will have more influence over him!"

But my wife, being an exceedingly clever etcher, had no desire to. When I look back, all this obstructionism—to give it a mild word—appears natural, if not inevitable. A mother's love is protective—if we may risk a generalisation—a father's

egotistic. I was an independent-spirited boy, whose chief desire was to achieve and enjoy a life of my own. This being so, there was doubtless little in me calculated to arouse the protective instinct. As for my father, though the scope of his interests was immense, they can hardly be said to have embraced even the fringe of the arts, with the single—and noble—exception of music. He read as a philologist. The human element meant nothing to him. He referred alike to the "quaint paganism" of the *Canterbury Tales* and *Peacock's Novels*. An exception which, I fear, proves the rule, was "The Paradise Of Birds", a poem by an obscure professorial plagiarist who took his main conception from Aristophanes, and his metres from Swinburne.

Others besides myself—William Morris, for example—have observed that, in Victoria's reign, science was thought the only serious occupation for an intelligent man! That is why the Victorian age appears so drab in retrospect, and will continue so to appear, despite Mr. Noel Coward's brilliant attempt, in "Cavalcade", to give it glamour. The ages which most appreciate the arts, are those which after ages most appreciate.

My father would say, "Music is a branch of mathematics". Emotional himself, he always suspected and disliked emotion. Yet he was very far from lacking aesthetic appreciation of music. Indeed he composed a cantata upon an English version by my aunt—his sister—of Schiller's, "Ode to Joy", and this was performed at a local musical society which he founded and of which, until he became too old, he was the leading spirit. Let me recall a few sayings which give a slant upon his peculiar habit of mind.

"If I like roast beef and apple-pie for dinner one day, I should be quite contented to have them for dinner every day of my life."

"I can't tell a rose from a cabbage": an apophthegm which did him less than justice. He had an uncanonical cult of the Pimpernel, and encouraged the gardener to plant out a small plot of them, which he called the "Pimpernellian". Such traits were lovable. An enthusiast for every type of standardisation—I have heard him complain that every bath-room tap in the world was not made to one pattern—he remained *sui generis*, and never standardised himself.

A visitor having praised me, "A genius," says my father, "is like a manufacturer of glass blue-bottle flies: he does them so well, and they are so useless!"

"Keep poetry for *after dinner*," was a slogan a thousand times repeated. As though vital work could be produced at a time when vitality was at its lowest.

Of my love of Shakespeare, my father told me, "You are like an Anglo-Indian who has lost his palate for honest roast beef, and can only taste curry!"

Somewhat overborne by the weight of his moral indignation, I ventured to ask, Shakespeare being "curry" in his simile, what constituted "honest roast beef"?

"*Pearson's Magazine!*" said he, "*The Royal!*"

When I was seven years old—I learned to read at five, and was studying and writing verse soon afterwards—I showed a lyric to my mother, which I came upon only the other day, and do not think discreditable. With a sour look at me, and pursing up her face, she left the room with it, and returned a moment after, saying, "I have just shown it to your brother Maurice, and *he* thinks it *idiotic* just as I do!" This was typical of my mother, and the glamour which "My eldest boy, Maurice," unfailingly exercised over her. He was then a schoolboy of nine. He had never written verse. He never read verse. But "My eldest son, Maurice," would be sure to *know*!

Between my parents and myself there was, as regards poetry and everything which I had most at heart, a dividing partition as impenetrable as a combined fireproof and black-out curtain. We met in the flesh; in the spirit never. I was the loneliest boy imaginable, and look back upon my earliest days, except when I was with my grandfather, with a sort of horror. But it must not be inferred from this that my mother lacked any of that feminine "savvey" in which women excel when confronted suddenly with nursery problems. I remember once running into the kitchen, where she was busy ordering the dinner, with appalling tidings.

"Mother, Tersh"—Adrian, my youngest brother—"is going blue!"

"What's he been doing? Has he swallowed something?"

"Yes! A bird-whistle!"

Now what would a man have done in these circumstances? Still in his slippers, he would have raced for the doctor. There was no 'phone in those days. Had he found the doctor in, which is exceedingly unlikely, the doctor would then have roared for his groom-of-all-work. This fellow, emerging from the potting-shed in the garden, in a green baize apron, would have proceeded

to harness up, and after a good deal of bungling with the straps and buckles, the brougham would have been got under way, the driver flogging the horses until they had attained something like nine good English miles an hour: and not bad going either, with that contraption behind! And there might be a slight interchange of curses and apologies as heavy-witted pedestrians got in the way, and only just missed being run over! There was no speed-sense in those days.

And when they arrived, the servants would have confessed by their weeping, that Pluto's wife, Persephone, was now welcoming a little stranger in her nursery in the underworld!

"But what did your mother do?"

"Elementary, my dear Watson! With the exercise of physical strength which I could not have conceived of her possessing, she reversed the lad upon the mat, caught him just above the ankles, and raising him in the air a good foot above the floor, shook, shook, and shook! It was my mother versus Death. My mother won. Death threw up the sponge, and my brother everything which he had swallowed that morning, *including* the bird-whistle.

"They shouldn't sell these things to children," said my mother, taking possession of it. "Mary, tidy-up, please." And she returned to the kitchen, to continue her conference with Elizabeth about dinner.

I should be falsifying my picture of my father were I to represent him as not often genial. Since on frosty mornings, we children had sometimes a short while to wait for breakfast, he composed, both words and air, of a nursery dance, with which we might warm ourselves up. These are the rules. Form a ring and jump to the rhythm. Figure 2: similar to Figure 1. Figure 3, resembles 2 and 1. Ready?

We dance, we dance, the Moo-Cow's dance,
Beating the ground are we!
No dance is like the Moo-cow's dance,
The Moo-Cow's dance for me!

But there was another side to my father, of-course. When I was a preparatory schoolboy of eight, I came down to breakfast on the first morning of my very first school-holiday. My father looked at me with an air of ferocity.

"Why didn't you get a prize!" he roared.

"I—I tried!"

"Look at that *brute!*" cries my father explosively, "it gives me indigestion to look at him!"

I got up, choking back tears—a schoolboy mustn't cry!—and without having touched my breakfast, left the room. I was not called back. A man who makes his lifelong slogan, "Study things not people!" is not in any full sense *human!* The fundamental difference between my father's outlook and mine was that, although I might look at things "through a kind of glory", I *did* look at them. Of every artist's art, life is the raw material. Now my father detested reality. In the man-made world of mathematical symbols, he was at home. Triangles behaved as one expected them to, and whatever a woman might do, the angle at the hypotenuse remained constant.

As a young fellow down from Oxford, I was so foolish, in the exuberance of first love, to show my father a lyric to my inamorata. What possessed me I cannot imagine, unless it were a longing for sympathy. He threw it upon the floor, trod upon it, and saying "Bad taste!" left the room. He burned his copy of *Suetonius*, "lest the servants should see it!" forgetting in his agitation, that neither the cook nor housemaid were likely to get at his Latin dictionaries, to pry into the scoundrelism of the Caesars.

"If I had lived in the Middle Ages," my father was fond of saying, "I should have been a monk."

That a monk manqué might not be the best judge of the lyrical faculty of a young poet, entering with intoxication upon his inheritance of life, never, I am persuaded, once entered his head. In true monastic vein, he spoke with disgust of the mediaeval *Tristan and Iseult*, and of *Romeo and Juliet*, as dealing with "pigsty love". The last word I ever heard him speak of my *New Poems* was—with Calvinistic intensity of tone—"I hate the *satyr* in your poetry!"

So much it seemed necessary to say of my early days. I shall offend members of my family, but if one fears giving offence, one must forego the writing of autobiography. The coal-house in the garden of our house at East Twickenham, offered me as a child, the Turpin's hide-out I needed for study. Here, sitting upon the window-sill to have light upon my page, and retreating into the shadows on the sound of a footstep, I read that parent of all Grand Guignol, the scene in *Henry VI*, Part II, where the intrepid Dutchess is betrayed into the hands of her sworn enemies by the ruffian Hume. The conjurers trace their circle. Spirits

rise. Spies lurk in ambush. Her foes rush in upon her! The Duchess is trapped!

That scene too thrilled me where Joan la Pucelle pleads with the Spirits who forsake her. She offers them her blood to drink! She will hack off a limb! She proffers life, body and soul, that France may not suffer defeat. The spirits hang their heads, and, without speaking, depart.

"Now put that down! You only read it to show off!"—the Governess-Warden had tracked me down. "You've got to *work* now!" And poor Miss Parsley—who was unable to read the simplest novel without a dictionary to seek the words in, would give me to read—incredible, but true!—one of those "moral tales" which Hilaire Belloc has so wittily satirised—"Grum-ble and Cheer-y." "Grum-ble rose late from bed, but Cheer-y was soon up. Why did Grum-ble rise late when Cheer-y rose so earl-y? I will tell you." Dissyllables were spaced to facilitate the task of reading.

By the time I was eight, it became obvious to me that my Governess stood between me and my chance of ever learning anything. I myself begged my father to send me to school. He said nothing at the time but, a few evenings later, he suddenly announced: "You are going to-morrow morning to St. Paul's Preparatory School!"

I had what I had asked for: but *what* was *that*? I thanked my father warmly; but felt like a Lancastrian politician, whom a Yorkist monarch has offered to accommodate with lodgings in the Tower.

Day dawned: there was no stopping it! I rose early, but my earnest request that I should go alone to school, was ungratified; the governess was told to accompany me. I succeeded, however, in persuading her to remain a hundred yards behind me, so soon as the portentous palace in red brick loomed up before us. The great main entrance was swallowing me up, the red owls upon the gables had ceased to quiz me, when I looked back. Oh, horror! She *had* followed after all, and was peering after me through the gate! Had I been a magician, I should have transformed her into a mule.

"That your governess?"

"M'ye-es," I faltered, attempting by the inflection of my voice to convey the impression that I now retained her in the capacity of confidential secretary.

"Good Lord!" cried my new acquaintance, "if I had *her*, and she tried to see me to school, I should buy a horse-whip!"

A bell rang. Those of the older boys who were in the playground strolled; the smaller ran, into the Great Hall. Before us was the platform which a dignitary who proved to be Bewsher, the Headmaster, was ascending by a flight of steps. The entire right side of the huge room was lit by lancet-shaped windows. To the left, three tiers of galleries, upon which the classrooms opened, gave the place the air of an eighteenth century coaching inn of prodigious size. This impression I owed perhaps to my having read *The Beggar's Opera*, at my grandfather's, or to some other play or novel of that period. I pictured a fellow in red waistcoat and leggings, coming suddenly out upon one of those galleries, and shouting to somebody else in the body of the hall, "Boy! take the gentleman's portmanteau. He'll be looking for it later at the 'Blue Boar'!" The pushing, scrambling, and uproar favoured the notion.

In my bewilderment, a form master upon the look-out, pounced upon me, demanded my name, and marched me to the division between two rows of benches, where I was to stand for prayers.

"Silence!" cried the Headmaster, and there was silence. It was as though, with a word, he had quelled a revolution. Why are some masters obeyed, and others not? It has very little to do with punishments. I believe the successful master is he who contrives to weave about himself such an air of aloofness that the schoolboy never, in his heart, believes him to be of quite the same clay as himself.

"Let us pray!"

The faintly amused look which the formal command to devotion now chased away, appeared to imply, "Go on being ludicrous and futile! I like having all you queer creatures in my zoo here! It would infuriate most men naturally, but I am very tolerant of all that's odd!"

In due course a hymn is announced. "Angels, martyrs, prophets, virgins"—something like this—"Answer, 'yes'." The boy on my right is apparently improvising, for his version, which he sings with singular sweetness, runs:

"Guinea-pigs, rabbits, mice and dormice
Answer, 'Yes'!"

His face expresses devotion, but he casts a covert look at the form master who, as a clergyman of the orthodox church, may be conservative enough to prefer the accepted text.

At last, the final "Amen!" And, Oh! the relief to move one's limbs after so much constraint. Everything was to prove very puzzling. Books, for example, had to be purchased, and this meant chits to be signed by the form master, and presented at the Book Room.

As none of the new arrivals knew where this was, a last term's boy, who had failed to get his remove, was deputed to act as "man from Cook's". Our passage lay through the Great Hall, under the very eye of Bewsher himself, so no misadventure befell. Had our guide been a free agent, he would doubtless have performed some lubberly jest, such as conducting his convoy to the lavatories, and there deserting it, but the presence of Authority made such pranks impracticable.

School-caps were fitted by a bald and bespectacled clerk, and exercise-books, foolscap, and pens supplied.

In this first class, I began the study of Latin which appeared to mean grammar, grammar, and again grammar. Simple exercises there were, but none that bore the faintest resemblance to real life. The study of grammar is, of course, of importance, but even at the outset, it should *not* be made an end in itself. This is rating the buttons above the page, and the meat above the dish. From the outset, grammar should be taught as the accompaniment to the text.

What has Latin to teach us? Exactitude, clarity, grace; the Greek beauty yet alive in Horace and Tibullus; the toughness of the Roman soul. There are many passages in the Classics which could hardly fail to delight children. Vergil, for instance, has his famous simile of the boy spinning the top. Would not such a passage as this, with a master to aid the "construe", captivate a child's imagination more than such a sentence as "Julia loves Cornelia", to be followed by "Cornelia loves Julia"? One sentence sticks in my memory, as symbolic of the whole fossilised system. This was for translation into Greek, when we had attained a higher standard. "They are shaking the doors and the windows." I remember my attempts to visualise the scene. The house must be in construction, or these things would be fixed. But why in Heaven's name, should several people spend time in shaking them? The Classics give truth,

simplicity, passion, which after handling by their professional exponents, become dust, cinders, cobwebs.

"Roots, Boy! Roots, roots, roots!"

The sun of midsummer, streaming through the windows, had induced a vision of Babbacombe, of aniline-dye blue seas, and coral cliffs.

"What *are* roots?"

Had the man gone mad? Did he wish me to say something about turnips or carrots?

"Here," says the Reverend—I really forget what—"have I been talking for three days about roots of Latin words, and you might never have heard of them!"

I never had! A childish disorder had kept me at home, but that Learning had forgotten. We would be solemnly informed that the older form of the word for a letter, "epistola", was incorrect. It should be written "epistula"; "Virgil" must be written "Vergil"! As though it mattered! My father wittily observed, "And they talk of Latin as a dead language! It changes from day to day!"

From the point of view of health, the school system of my boyhood was pernicious. We took so much homework back that, between the ages of eight and fifteen, it was rare for me to turn in before half-past eleven at night. Then, with all that I had been striving to master fermenting in my head, I would toss and turn, and hear the clock strike till half-past four in the morning. And I would be up at seven or earlier. My father sacrificed much of his evening leisure to lighten our vigils. I would enter the laboratory, where he was at work upon his induction coil, with the raw material for a Latin verse which would *not* "come out"! It would be, "Father, I have never mixed cups with death-dealing juices."

"I'm uncommonly glad to hear it, old man!"

And French! The convention forbade that this should be taken seriously. French masters are small, and boys demand muscles in their instructors! Had they sent us some the equivalent of Georges Carpentier, we might have learned without losing caste. The French master was infinitely painstaking.

I remember the poor man's copper-plate handwriting, with which he would cover the blackboard, rub out, and cover it again, in the course of the afternoon. Perhaps he might have taught us something—he was keen enough—but for the grammar fetish which invaded his class-room as it did those of the classical

masters. There were complicated conditional sentences skitted by one of the boys under this type example: "Use'ntest thy grandmother to have *not* played the flute?" While not one of us could have said in French, "Give the cat its milk," here we all were cramming out of the way tenses which perhaps no Academician had occasion to use half-a-dozen times in his life.

I remember two peculiarities of the French master's dress: the diminutive gold medal of his patron saint which he wore mounted upon a gold pin in his tie, and his shoes, which never seemed quite to conform to accepted standards. Meeting him by chance much later in life, "I make them myself," he informed me, "as an economy." He was married, a good Catholic, and had a family.

"What made you leave *la Patrie*?"

"As a boy, I read in French an account of the explorations of Captain Cook, which fired me with an enthusiasm for all things English. I began my explorations by seeking your shores!"

His circumnavigation of the globe had begun at Calais, poor fellow, and ended at Dover! The uncharted Pacific had shrunk to the Channel, which he recrossed, on holidays, with Madame; the boys bringing their bicycles. His galley was his form room, and the faint flushed cliffs of Atlantis had taken on the prosaic semblance of Hammersmith Broadway!

CHAPTER III

SCHOOL DAYS

THE lowest form at Colet Court, for the youngest boys, was conducted by a woman teacher. These children were referred to as "the kids", and their classroom as the "Nursery". We older boys felt that we had emancipated ourselves from "all that". This was as it should be. One is sent to a public school to acquire, amongst other qualities, a manly toughness, and it is not from women that men acquire the virile virtues. To-day one hears perhaps as never before, the feminine complaint of the lack of "manly men". Yet we have heard of women who desire to obtain masterships in our older schools. The more women exercise their influence over boyhood and youth, when the future citizen is at his most impressionable, the more that influence will tend to render him effeminate.

Football and cricket bored me excessively, though when I left the Preparatory for the school proper, I loved boxing, swimming, and the cadet corps; and perhaps now, or a little later, took a private course of lessons in fencing. I was sceptical then, and must confess to being so now, as to the catalogue of virtues which team games are said to produce. They *may* do so, but one would like more evidence. There was no compulsory games system in the eighteenth century, and wherever the Battle of Waterloo may have been won, it is at least arguable that the victories of Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet were won on the battlefields which gave them their names. It is upon himself and not his side, that the sniper in No Man's Land is called upon to rely.

At Colet Court, I began to obtain my first insight into human character, a lesson incomparably more important than the knowledge that "Julia loved Cornelia", and "Cornelia Julia". I was slow to realise that dogmatic statements must be accepted with reserve. I had been given one of those elaborate pocket-knives beloved of schoolboys; a portable workshop with a miniature saw, and a hook which might serve a thousand purposes.

"What's the hook for?" a boy enquired.

"For taking stones out of horses' hooves," I declared at random. With a world of art he proceeded to harrow my feelings with an account of the agonies which his pony was, even at that moment, undergoing, for lack of just such an instrument to remove a stone lodged in its hoof! He got the knife, of course. I made, however, many agreeable friendships.

There was one boy who would invite me, during the lunch interval, to "watch the soldiers drill in Wellington barracks".

"Do you know anyone there?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"But how do you pass the sentry?"

"Come and see!"

Motionless as a statue, in the very centre of the arch, sat the sentry on his horse.

"Morning, Sentry!" cries my young impostor, "suppose I may bring a friend? Father's drilling 'em to-day!"

And there was Guy, an imaginative youngster possessed of many air-guns and a cuckoo-clock. He organised interesting shoots. An ingenious lad, he said to himself, "If I catch cold, I shall have to stay away from school. That would be delightful!" So he immersed himself completely in the bath, and then leaned out of a window in a North East wind, naked, when the ground was covered with snow! And this he continued doing a very long time. Unfortunately he felt none the worse for it, and so was compelled to continue his studies!

And I recall another youth, a very Puck for sportive tricks. When I had left the Preparatory for St. Paul's, he invited me to take a drink with him at his Club, the "Turf". His amusement when I ventured to remark that, upon the whole perhaps, very few of the members looked distinguished, was immense. We were in the saloon bar of a public-house. In return for this courtesy, I invited him to the "Shakespeare", not as to a "club", but for a game of billiards. Those were the breezy Edwardian days, and the landlord and his pals were alike under the "influence of the God". They desired to demonstrate divers master strokes in the game, by studying which, if we put our minds to it, we should be able to make a deal of money. Their movements, however, were so unsteady, as to suggest not billiards but yachting! The landlord wore what he supposed to be a flower in his button-hole. It was in reality a peacock's feather.

And there was Keller who shot a sea-gull which flew above his garden. When the bird snapped his beak at him, he offered

it sardines, when such was the Herculean toughness of the creature, it forgot the pellets in its leg, and settled down immediately to dinner. In due course, Keller procured it a wife from a livestock shop. A nest and a family resulted.

In the holidays, my father took us to see *Lohengrin*, *Tannhauser* and *Tristan*; and for his introduction to opera, I can never be sufficiently grateful to him.

He was playing the "Bridal March" from *Lohengrin*, in our drawing-room at home, upon a small organ which, I believe, he had made himself, when he chanced to ask my brother, "What he thought of it?" "Maurice replied that he "preferred *John Peel*". This memory rankled, and, many years afterwards, my father observed to me, his eye glazed with rage, "Your brother Maurice, you know, used to say that the only music he could *stand* was, 'Tommy make room for your uncle'!"

As an undergraduate at Wadham, my father had run down to London to hear "Tristan" when Wagner was still "one of the moderns". Ravished by his own music, and by the fat prima donna's curvy charms, the Master leaped upon the stage at the conclusion of the piece, and before the falling curtain could obscure him, was observed by the audience, to be locked with the portly nightingale in a voluminous embrace. Despite his glorious genius, Wagner, so I judge from my father's account of him, must have been, in many ways, a typical Hun. The Parisians had no use for him, and the Paris "Jockey Club" greeted his music with blasts upon police whistles! Not so the Londoners! They played Wagner to audiences who were used to the earlier, and sprightlier Italian operas, and these audiences gradually diminished. Those who had backed Wagner financially, had heavy losses. Did they repine? Not a bit of it! They paid the Master every penny of the money promised, and before he set off home to the Fatherland, invited him to a banquet, as guest of honour, where the most flattering speeches were made in his honour. In return for so much English chivalry, Wagner upon his return, "composed vitriolic pamphlets", said my father, "blackguarding the 'English'".

Influenced by my fellow Coletines, to whom poetry was an art as unknown as alchemy, I ceased for a brief while to read anything worth reading. "Penny Dreadfuls" were the mode, and wrecked on the Fijian strand, I did at Totoya as the Totoyans did. *Your Life* was the title of one of these masterpieces; *A Scalp*

and *Two Eye-balls* another. The print was minute, and so faded as to be physically injurious.

My reawakening to beauty came with my discovery of the "Victoria and Albert" museum. The room which delighted me beyond all the others was that which contained the Michelangelo "Cupid". I fell to studying the beautiful thing as though I were under a spell. Later I read in an author of the Renaissance, that one may sometimes cure a headache by gazing upon a thing of beauty. My author hardly exaggerated if at all. I would receive intense delight and a sort of shock from such things. Beauty became again for me, what it had been when I was a child, a prime necessity like bread and salt.

Shakespeare had, in some sort, prepared me for the variety of lovely exhibits with which I was now becoming acquainted: with the Lucia della Robbia plaques; with the Donatello "David" in which Jewish morosity is subdued to a new Hellenic grace; for the so-called "Medicean" Aphrodite. And these in turn sent me back to Shakespeare.

"We'll show thee Io as she was a maid . . .
Or Daphne roaming through a thorny-wood,
Scratching her legs, that one shall swear she bleeds;
So workmanly the blood and tears are drawn."

Our walls at Colet Court were hung with the type of picture which tells a story. Amongst these masterpieces, was one of a Puritan soldier "pumping" a Cavalier "Angel Child", entitled "When did you last see your Father?" Elder sisters stand aside and weep? Will little Lord Fauntleroy give the show away? The headmaster came upon me staring at this piece of Wardour Street, and mistaking my cynicism for bewilderment, exclaimed—

"What does that picture *mean* to you, Boy?"

He sailed away, his gown billowing behind him, crying over his shoulder: "Think it over, Boy! Think it over!"

I was eleven when war was declared upon the Boers, and for a while everything went badly for us. Our generals—so our elders declared—were unable to adapt themselves to novel tactics. A Canadian soldier whom I met long afterwards, endorsed this view. He had been sent in advance of his detachment, to observe a kopje which it had been decided to attack. Screened by cover, he studied his objective for two whole hours, in the course of which time, he had observed three bayonets glitter, in three different parts of the hill. This he reported to

his superior officer, adding, "If I *saw* three, there are probably three hundred!"

His officer took him up tersely with, "If you *saw* three, I take it there *were* three!"

They were marched up to be slaughtered in column of route. By such conduct did Gage and Burgoyne lose us America! "A war of the mailed fist!" was the public comment upon such methods. For us boys the reverses encouraged us to hope that "if only it lasted long enough, we might be able to take part in it". Our patriotism overflowed in buttons of favourite generals, on sale at a thousand shops.

"Who'll swap me a *Sir George White* for a *Redvers Buller*?"

"Haven't got a *Buller*!"

"What swaps have you got?"

"I've got a *Kekewich*."

"Why didn't you say so, Fathead?"

Propaganda against us on the Continent was virulent in those days. By what chance I can't call to mind, I came upon a copy of *La Patrie*. Although the school system was against the possibility of my acquiring an accent, I was—so far as vocabulary went—picking up French at home, by reading the novels of Jules Verne. *La Patrie* informed me that "*le docteur anglais*, Miller, had himself shot with a rifle, six Boer nurses through the window of a hospital!" Incredible that people could believe such imbecility, but one gathered that they did! Stones, we were told by our elders, were thrown at such English tourists as still ventured to tour the Continent with their brogues, tweeds, haversacks, and golf-clubs.

Whether the heads of the General Staffs were weak or not, I was far too young to know; the arm-chair critic was vocal then as now. But that hearts were stout, was a fact manifest to every schoolboy. Two friends, much older than myself, whom I admired because they had made a workable skiff in which they rowed upon the Thames, came back half crazy with their deprivations. They spoke of an Order of the Day which read: "In future the pool with the three dead mules in it, will only be used for watering horses." They had broken their teeth on biscuit.

At long last, the tide turned, and forgetting our chagrin at not having grown fast enough to take part in the war, we Coetines joined with the million in applauding the returning "C.I.V's". (City Imperial Volunteers.) The Headmaster leading us out of school in person, succeeded in canalising our

vocal efforts. The relief of Mafeking was to add a word to the language, for the rejoicings lacked dignity. A boy was requested by a form-master to remove an Union Jack waistcoat! Living far out at Twickenham, I missed the "sights": such as gentlemen in full evening dress, swimming the Channel in the basins of Trafalgar Square! An older boy informed me that, as he was walking home through Piccadilly, a prostitute was vociferating: "My price is a guinea, but any bloody soldier can have me for nothing!" A patriotic declaration of which the precise significance escaped, though it troubled me. Despite Shakespeare and Michelangelo, I had been "nicely brought up".

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The Preparatory is behind me. I am a full-fledged Pauline, and the bell is ringing for prayers upon the evening of my first day. "Old" Walker, the "Highmaster", approaches: an excessively impressive figure. His queer shuffling walk, as of one afflicted with gout, or afraid, should he raise his feet too high, of losing his carpet slippers, in no way detracts from his prodigious dignity. Neither do his trousers—clearly revealed as his gown floats backwards—which are so baggy as to suggest that he made them himself in moments snatched from his professional avocations.

He takes his stand upon the platform amidst profound silence, prayer-book in hand. His scowling eye brows of bristly grey hair, give him something the air of a Hebrew prophet in a cheap boarding-house print. Latin prayers: wise proviso! Few of us newcomers are equal to "sight" translation in the golden tongue of Cicero, and so not the queasiest conscience is offended. High Churchmen, Presbyterians, Quakers or Shakers are as brothers in their profound ignorance as to what the service is about. We are as lambs to whom an eccentric shepherd declaims an Act of Parliament. "*Oremus!*" the erudite buccaneer ejaculates,— "Let us pray!"—and regards Heaven, and then our quaking selves, with the ferocity of a raiding Cossack.

But lest these early chapters prolong themselves unduly, I must confine myself to a few pictures only, of the many which present themselves to the eye of memory. I remember another master, an excellent disciplinarian, but handicapped by slight deafness. High notes he could immediately distinguish, but not, low ones. To exploit his infirmity was the reverse of chivalrous, but boys cannot be expected to weigh such matters nicely. A

master is there to keep order. It becomes therefore a point of honour to be disorderly. And this, upon the whole is as it should be. We do not want the youth of the country to grow up sheep! Afternoons were devoted to music, and a regular programme would be arranged beforehand.

"Ready?" comes our self-appointed bandmaster's stealthy whisper, "*then start!*" And it would be "Onward Christian Soldiers!" or "Bedelia", from the latest "Gaiety" success: the two airs which everybody knew. Earnest faces, much searching through vocabularies, the strident scratching of pens, and in not unmelodious undertone:

"Be—de—li—a,
I'm going to steal yer,
Be—de—li—a,
You are a Queen!
I'll be your Martin Harvey,
If you'll be
My Evie Green!
Say something sweet, Bedelia,
Something I long to hear,
Oh, Bedelia, 'delia, 'delia,
I've made up my mind to steal yer
Steal yer, steal yer,
Bedelia dear!"

Sometimes, in place of the "Bedelia" of this intellectual rhapsody, the name of the young lady who kept the tuckshop would be inserted, and Rabelaisian homage offered.

One boy whose voice suggested a too prolonged holiday in Turkey, was liable to uncontrollable soprano excursions. On such occasions, Authority would swoop!

"What's that! You made a squealing noise. What do you mean by it!"

Then "Bouley"—my friend E. G. Boulenger, later Director and creator of the Aquarium at Regent's Park,—would rise to save the culprit from destruction.

Gravely, from his desk, his tie well knotted, his hair perfectly parted, he would explain.

"Excuse me, Sir, I heard it too. It's the siren at the Works, at 'Thorneycrofts'; they call the hands to tea about this time."

"Ah, I see. But I don't know why *you* should answer. It wasn't *you* I was addressing. You thought it was? Well, you

were wrong. Why didn't *you* tell me, you little nincompoop? I thought it was just impertinence. Go on everyone!"

On a similar occasion when this luckless youth sat trembling, as the result of another skylark trill, "Bouley" once more came forward to explain.

This time the form had given up the soprano for lost.

"Sir, may I say something?"

"What is it? Nobody was speaking to you!"

"Sir, it's this new motor show at Olympia; I was there yesterday in the lunch hour——"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Oh, nothing, Sir, but the public *will* keep pinching the hooters. So silly of them, Sir, don't you think?"

I recall on looking back sundry such ridiculous "rags", but I should be ungrateful if I were for one moment to forget the debt I owe St. Paul's. It gave me the foundation of such classical culture as I possess, and whatever be the quantum, I would not barter it for rubies.

A new master was taking over at end of term, for one who was ill. A boy, doubtless of country extraction, successfully snared two of our tame London pigeons, and concealed them in his desk. Suddenly, during the quiet of the afternoon, a deft kick sent the affrighted birds whirring round the chandelier. The form proffered sympathy and advice, in full chorus.

"Oh, Sir!"

"Did you see *that*, Sir? *Birds*, Sir!"

"They oughtn't to be in *here*, Sir!"

"May I help you put them out, Sir?"

"*Silence!*" thundered the temporary form-master: too late. The rush had begun!

"Stop it you beast! Get off my hand!"

"You ought to be proud I'm standing on it!"

"You swine!"

"Swine'? Am I? Take that!"

Several minutes elapsed, before even the semblance of order could be restored. . . .

"Why don't you cut 'Gym'?" a polite young sprig demanded, "don't you find it awfully boring?"

"Yes, but how can one?"

"Elementary, my dear Watson"! Come and see how I manage."

Owing to some minor nervous affliction, the master responsible

for dealing with absentees from games, had a habit of blinking, which earned for him the sobriquet of "Blinkie Bill". When seen in profile, this looked as though he were winking, a mannerism that was seized upon with delight by jokers. New boys were taken aside by old ones who purported, upon short acquaintance, to be sincere friends. To them this genial and humane master was represented as a ruffian, cruel as Nero, and eccentric as a Regency buck. He would wink at you, oh, yes, but salvation lay in winking back. Neglect to take him in his own vein and wink back, stonewall him, and: the Lord have mercy on you!

"Blinkie" would receive games and "gym" defaulters in relays, and every new boy as he approached the desk, would wink knowingly at him, in the hope of escaping punishment. My sparkish friend was far too knowing to wink. From my station outside the door where "Sparkles" had placed me, I was privileged to overhear the following dialogue; "Blinkie" speaking with a lisp, another of his idiosyncrasies.

BLINKIE: "Why weren't you present at gthym" (gym).

SPARKLES: "Sir, I injured my hand."

BLINKIE BILL (*ironically*): "And how did you manage that?"

SPARKLES: "Sir, I was making a parrot-cage, and the chisel slipped. (*Wincing*). I cut it to the bone, Sir!"

BLINKIE BILL: "I don't believe a word of it. Undo that bandage!"

SPARKLES (*with hideous grimaces, and an occasional sharp intake of the breath*): "Sir, it hurts!"

BLINKIE (*still sceptical*): "Well?"

SPARKLES (*slowly unwinding a bandage of incredible length, every shred of which appears to be saturated with blood*): "Oh—o!"

BLINKIE BILL: "Do it up again, Boy! You're making me thick!" (sick).

SPARKLES (*politely, but catching the lisp*): "Thorry. Sir!" (*With melodramatic gestures, wincing and twitching, Sparkles rewinds the bandage, fixes it with a pin, and mops his forehead.*) "Phew!"

BLINKIE BILL: "Cut along now. Do you thuppose you'll be able to attend gthym next Wednesday? Your finger should have properly healed by then?"

SPARKLES: "I hope so, Sir! Oh, I do hope so, Sir! I'm awfully keen on gym, Sir. I'm trying for my 'B' certificate!"

BLINKIE BILL: "Good boy! Cut along now."

"That's how it's done," my young shaver observes, as we meet outside the door.

"Well, if you have to half cut your hand off every time you want to get off gym: no thanks!"

"My poor demented Watson! What do *you* think? This is only crimson lake mixed with a bit of gamboge. You can pinch it at the Art School!"

My cult of the "Victoria and Albert" museum I still retained, and hardly a day of the holidays passed on which I did not contrive to visit it. Tapestries, iron-work, "period" rooms, all fascinated me, but the exhibits which most bewitched me were those connected by European tradition with Greece and Rome. An incidental effect of my passion was an attempt to write better Latin prose. My then form-master—who, as I learned later, had composed sundry excellent translations from Tibullus—humorously observed,

"Hare, your prose is like a queer town: plenty of slums, but some good hotels!"

My literary proclivities did not remain unnoticed. "Tommy" had given us a Wordsworthian sonnet for dictation.

"O Friend! I know not which way I must look——"

"Hare," says "Tommy", in his habitual drawling and sarcastic tones, "you are a poet! You have taken down the sonnet without a single mistake, which nobody else in the form has. Everybody but you has bungled the rhyme-scheme. *Are* you a poet? Because, if not, you will be. But please don't suppose that poets are important. They are not so important as cooks!" Thus did "Tommy" rank himself with the materialists against whom Wordsworth inveighs!

Although I jealously guarded the secret that I had composed verse for many years back, I was often tackled by masters humorously intent upon guaging the extent of my reading. *Pickwick* I knew through and through, as I suppose many people did at that time. Dickens reflected a type of life which was by no means too remote from our own for us to understand much that he laughed *with* or *at*. We still had leisure. We still had pubs which kept open the long day through, and great part of the night; and hence we had that *popular* night life which has to-day practically disappeared. Men go to bed early now, for there is nowhere else for them to go! We still had "characters", and the dandy who dressed extravagantly but *sui generis*, was ready for introducing upon the music-hall stage by any author who chose to note his antics. Science loves uniformity; Nature, variety. We were assuredly more natural. We were neither

Americanised nor mechanised. I doubt indeed whether the word "mechanised" had yet come into the language.

It was Botting, that genial and humane man, who asked me who wrote:

"For his religion it was fit
To match his learning and his wit——"

and appeared astonished at discovering that I could continue from that point and recite the whole passage. Whilst correcting an exercise of mine, it was Owen who quoted the fragmentary line from Ennius:

"cere—comminuit—brum,"

omitting the word "saxo" with which it begins. Scenting a trap I quoted it in full:

"Saxo cere—comminuit—brum."

"Hare!" cried Owen, "you are an astonishing boy. Of things which every other boy knows, you know nothing. And you know things which no boy born *ought* to know!" I remember, however, that when Wainwright had given the form leave to write an essay, every boy choosing whatever subject he liked, his being by no means pleased with my selection. Campbell, I remember, a tough Scot, wrote upon "The Best Defence is Attack", and suggested an immediate onslaught upon the Hun who was believed, even then, to be arming against us. Did Drake wait for a formal declaration from Spain, before sailing to Cadiz to singe the King's beard? Most of the class, however, chose "Joan of Arc" for subject, for—whether truly or falsely—it was believed that this form master had a veritable cult for her, and would therefore—or so they reasoned—be the more likely to welcome their highly diplomatic panegyrics!

"What's this, Hare?" cries he. "'Comedy of Wit and Intrigue'? It's a *beastly* subject!"

I was in Botting's form, one term, for arithmetic, a subject which I heartily detested, although I passed muster at geometry, and genuinely liked algebra. Attempting once when really irritated, to raise a laugh at my expense.

"How do you know," says he, "my poor Hare, that Point Five is a half?"

"I heard it, Sir."

"What do you mean: '*heard* it'?"

"Idle gossip!" I murmured,

I had no notion of this impertinence reaching him, but my voice is carrying, even when I whisper. His frown smoothed itself out, his smile became expansive, and I realised that I might consider myself reprieved! Many years later, when I had left Oxford, a lady told me that she had heard Botting refer to me as, "the most brilliant boy he had known at the school"!

Besides my perennial Victoria and Albert museum, I enjoyed another escape from routine in the theatre. Ellen Terry I saw only once, yet I was thrilled by that superb experience! Once was little enough, to be sure, yet was it memorable; one need not drain a butt, to sample a wine. Ellen Terry possessed two supreme characteristics, the ability to *live* the character she interpreted, and absolute naturalness. I saw her as one of the "Merry Wives"—Mistress Ford, I believe—and her image is lively before me at this moment of writing. Surely, for the very gold of comedy, no actress ever surpassed her in that scene where the two ladies conceal Sir John in the laundry basket!

Rather cruel humour, when you come to think of it, this penning of a very old man in a buck-basket of stinking linen. For that age was not ours: the "Virgin Queen", "took," so her Physician informs us, "a bath every month, whether she needed it or not." The Mistress Fords of Shakespeare's day washed less frequently! Yet how the great actress carried it off! No sooner was the unfortunate securely hasped in than tears of laughter coursed down her cheeks, to the detriment incidentally, of her make-up. Ellen Terry was not the interpreter of a rôle, but a woman laughing consumedly from a full heart! She carried the house with her. The audience appeared intoxicated with joy.

Let me conclude this chapter upon my school days with some reminiscences of Elam. No boy who was ever in his form was likely to forget that remarkable experience. His reputation for eccentricity he unquestionably deserved, and yet, I suspected, there was some element of pose in it. He was on equivocal terms with the redoubtable High Master, and may have supposed that a trifle of fantasy was the readiest way to annoy him. It was on the day appointed for the unveiling of the statue to Dean Colet, our founder, or shall I say our second founder? For St. Paul's had been in existence long before the Dean became its patron and settled its precarious finances upon a footing of security.

Away back in the Middle Ages, the boys of St. Antony's

Hospital—a school long deceased—and those of St. Paul's, were wont to meet and taunt one another. The St. Antony boys were "Pigs", from the symbol of the saint in sacred art. The St. Paul's boys were "Pigeons", from the pigeons which even in those far days, pecked and fluttered about the pinnacles of Old St. Paul's, in whose mighty shadow, the first St. Paul's school stood.

Latin was taught then—why is it not to-day?—as a *living* language, and the Paulines debated publicly at Bartholomew Fair. Brawls between the rival scholars were of frequent occurrence and *Visne disputare?*—will you debate with me?—"Pig" would demand of "Pigeon" on meeting him, or "Pigeon" of "Pig". The debate would then be opened, not in the rhetoric of Cicero, but with satchels of books used club-wise, to the inconvenience of footman and horseman for the streets of Old London were narrow!

Well, the statue of Dean Colet was to be unveiled in the gardens before the school. It was a sharp winter afternoon, yet there was a creditable assembly of parents and sisters, and of Old Boys from many quarters, come to witness and applaud. Running hither and thither to keep warm, Elam kept exclaiming in penetrating tones: "Another ten minutes of this tomfoolery, and we shall all catch our deaths from cold!" Such conduct was not suave, but how it delighted us boys!

Elam was a bachelor in those days and did his own shopping, and although I never witnessed this myself, it was an article of faith with the boys that he had been known to place toilet rolls, in public view, upon his class-room desk! I have seen him stroll up and down, up and down the corridor before afternoon school, between the rows of lockers, and beneath the tranquil gaze of the Heroes, and Gods, and Philosophers of Antiquity in marble, his arms full of pots of geraniums, and followed at a safe distance by boys with linked arms, chanting the coster cry of "All a-growing and a-blowing!"

Such happenings fed his sardonic humour, but no martinet of them all kept better discipline than he when he was so minded. He had authority, and could bully those who came to bully him. I remember a drowsy midsummer afternoon when, pulling off the elastic-sided boots which he habitually wore, he placed them neatly upon the desk before him, as coolly as though he were turning in for the night. He next put his feet, cased only in yellow worsted socks, upon his desk, alongside the boots, and

composed himself for slumber. Such was his control of his class that, unbelievable though it may sound, no boy in that room uttered a syllable! Whilst Elam was thus meditating or dozing, the door opened, and framed within the open space, stood the "Highmaster", Walker, looking as fierce as in his caricature by "Spy".

Elam examined the intruder through the V-shaped aperture formed by his two feet, as one wool-encased little toe rested against the other. It was as though he were sighting a gun. Like a bulldog scenting an affray, the "High Man" advanced. Swift as the darting of a snake, Elam was on his feet. "Now!" he cried, and no type is big enough to convey the menace in that monosyllable, "*NOW!* are *you* going to bully *me*?"

Slowly, with portentous dignity, the Highmaster withdrew.

Sometimes Elam would indulge in playful fantasy.

"Hare," he cried, as books in hand I was speeding on my way to prayers in the Great Hall, "is your father going to-night to the 'Old Merchant Taylors' dinner?"

"Yes, Sir."

"The Seedy Usher," said Elam, "could hardly present himself at *that* assembly in his threadbare dress-suit, but you might ask your father to send me by you a few crackers, and you might add that I am very partial to those little Tangerine oranges."

Once a boy gave him a message from his father, inviting him to dinner.

"No, my boy," he exclaimed, "I couldn't possibly go to your lordly abode. As I waited beneath the porch, I should hear the Second Parlour-maid call to the Under Butler, 'James! Here comes the Seedy Usher! Lock up the spoons!'"

Once, as the slow afternoon dragged to its close, he fell to singing, "Would that I had the wings of a dove!" Then rounding suddenly upon an oaf who laughed: "Do *you* desire the wings of a dove?" he asked sarcastically.

"Yes, Sir!"

"And why?"—it was like Counsel for the Prosecution interrogating a victim—"and *why* do you desire the wings of a dove?"

"Because if I had them, Sir, I'd be out of this in double quick time!"

The boy had scored, but Elam smiled. The unusual man regarded me with suspicion until it suddenly dawned upon him that I was an enthusiast for Latin verse. Then his attitude

changed. Commenting upon the word "old", which some boy had misused in an essay, he observed, "The connotation of the word 'old' is by no means confined to antiquity. Sometimes it implies affection, as we say, 'Old' Hare!"

Every night we were given a few lines of Ovid to learn for repetition, and so soon as it came to my turn to recite, the oafs of the form would indulge in the pantomime of working imaginary hurdy-gurdies. There was inducement, for I had to declaim not only my regulation four lines, but every line which we had learned to date. So often as I glanced at Elam for instructions, he would cry, "Continue, the boy, Hare!" So my rhapsody continued. Not unwillingly, for I loved the verses.

—*Iane biceps anni tacite labentis origo*—

"'Origo'," interpolates Elam, "is the origin, or birth of anything; you may render it, if you like, 'dayspring'. Two-headed Janus, Dayspring of the year which silently glides by——" At this point, the interpreter would catch sight of the hurdy-gurdy players, and bound towards them tiger-fashion. They would not "silently glide by", but fling themselves from the room panic-stricken, into the corridor outside, when, the quarry having gone to earth, the huntsman would nonchalantly return, crying as though nothing whatever had happened, "Continue, the boy, Hare!"

Whilst I thus recall his oddities, it would be the height of injustice were I not to add that no master in the school surpassed, if indeed any approached him, in the art of imparting knowledge and even in inspiring an enthusiasm for learning. There was nothing of the pedant about Elam. He was never guilty of the pedagogic crime of degrading a poem into a text. He was a fine scholar and a man of imagination. He was furthermore, a professed enemy of half measures and inefficiency, and a no less professed friend of whatever was solid, and British, and sterling.

Now you shall hear, with the mental ear, his base and penetrating voice, crying in the wilderness hard by Hammersmith Broadway. "After his invocation, Ovid proceeds to give us a vivid picture of a Roman holiday; just such a day as—Stop laughing, you grinning imbecile, you stock, you stoat, you! What do you suppose your father sends you here for: just to dawdle and drible? You boys are the very dandruff and scurf of the world! You do nothing but crib and cram, shuffle and

shift, from the moment when you come within those gates of a morning"—oratorical sweep of the arm towards the entrance—"till the moment when you leave of an evening! A narrow-necked generation of shufflers! I was saying, when Oaf Jackson interrupted me, that this Roman holiday—the feast-day which Ovid is about to describe—was uncommonly like a London Bank Holiday when, after locking and bolting the front door, one retires to one's room, first loading the blunderbuss and turning the dog loose in the hall!—Continue! the boy, Hare!"

"*Dexter ades*—"

"Very good! Any more laughing, and back you all go to your desks, to do Greek prose for the rest of the afternoon."

Despite Elam's clowning style, one did at least wake to appreciation of the fact, never hinted at by other masters, that poetry was not science, that it was inspired by passion, and that its raw material was life. Once I remember his leaning against the hot-water pipes beneath the window, lost to the world in a book. Suddenly he began to read to himself aloud, as a lonely man will talk to himself. The work was written in Latin.

"How beautiful!" Elam exclaimed. "How superlatively well expressed."

"Oh! charming, Sir! How can he think of such things?"

"Beautiful indeed, Sir!"

"Very exciting, Sir!"

And so forth, from the form. Sometimes he would break a profound silence with the poignant cry: "Oh! when I think of it all!" He would diversify geography—a subject of which he was a master indeed—with particulars of personal experiences. Somewhere in Spain, he had circumvented a bandit who attempted fruitlessly to rob him of his purse.

"What did you say to him, Sir?"

"I said,"—a prodigious shout here—"A-ha! my friend! Who sups with the Devil must have a long spoon."

Schoolboys are instinctive judges of character, and we none of us doubted the veracity of the story. Elam gave the impression of considerable personal courage. When his mood was alert, no one ventured upon impertinences. When it appeared languid, risks might be taken.

"Sir?"

"Well?"

"Were you alive, Sir, at the time of the great Fire of London?"

"No, my boy! I may be old, but I'm not quite so old as that!"

Dare the boy venture again? Encouraged by mouse-like whispers of, "Go it!":

"Sir?"

"Well?"

"Sir, have you ever tasted human flesh?"

"No, my boy. The beggarly Usher may have sunk low, but not quite so low as that!"

Where was it: in France? In Spain? that he caught sight of a boy wearing the school cap. He called the boy to him.

"It máy interest you to know," said he, "that the sight of that cap of yours has completely ruined my holiday!"

Yet with so much wilful extravagance, those who left Elam's form were sometimes astonished to discover just how much they had learned. His reading in all branches of literature, both Classical and contemporary, appeared inexhaustible. History? The past appeared as vivid as the present, when Elam harangued us upon the Battle of Hastings, and refused to take Odo seriously as a pillar of the Church.

"Hare, you shall not have a mark for Odo! He was *not* an 'eminent Churchman'; he was a crown-cracking scoundrel! You shall have as many as nought for him!"

"Sir! You must give me a mark for 'Odo'!"

"And why 'must' I give you a mark for him?"

"Sir, because you gave me one for him last week, and he can't have changed!"

"Aren't you an odious boy, Hare? Don't you yourself consider yourself to be odious? Well, take your mark: but never dare to dish him up for me again!" One remembers Elam partly, of course, for the raciness of his style.

Campbell enters half a minute late, his hair yet dripping from the school baths!

"Come in," cried Elam, "you *half-drowned rat*, you!"

There was a sensation when it became known that our form master had married. My younger brother Adrian, who was then in his form, I having moved on, observed with characteristic politeness, "Will you allow me to congratulate you, Sir?"


"Upon what, my boy?"

"Upon the announcement in the *Morning Post*, Sir."

"That is a matter, my boy, for the sincerest condolence!

When a man of my age marries, he should be conducted kindly but firmly towards the yard, and: poleaxed!" Then, as though sensible that such words might suggest a lack of chivalry, Elam hastened to explain, "At the very time when my children will need me most"—a flourish of his hand towards the ceiling—"I shall be singing aloft!" But it was obvious that order was creeping into his affairs, and although he retained the elastic-sided boots, he did no more shopping. Not again were the form to be regaled with the poetry of geraniums, or the prose of toilet rolls!

And now, a last impression. It is almost five minutes to Evening Prayers, when school will be over for the day. All listen for the bell. Nobody is working. Everybody is pretending to. Suddenly from the abyss of a not too monstrous melancholy, Elam proclaims: "One more hour from the day, and one more day from my life! Stand down from my dais, Boy, or I may feel impelled to hit you! I shall go home to dinner shortly—duck and green peas I have reason to believe it will be to-night—and you boys will pass out of my life! .It will be to me as though you never had been!"



CHAPTER IV

HOLIDAY ABROAD

THE friends I made at school included Ion Swinley, the Shakespearian actor, though I did not discover that he composed poetry until he left. In Compton Mackenzie, with whose delightful qualities as host, I made acquaintance in 1924, on his beautiful island of Jethou, I should have found a kindred spirit, had he not been too much my senior. I would see him, on winter mornings, in the Bloods' enclosure, basking serenely in the warmth of the sacred radiators. Amongst the group was "'Monkey' Montie", sinewy, athletic, but so unassertive that nobody could have divined in him a future Field Marshal; one of the glorious pantheon of British soldiers of genius. I owe a debt to St. Paul's which I feel the more impelled to acknowledge, as so many enemies decry the public school system to-day. One would think that the number alone of the great men who stand to the credit of these institutions, should plead, with the tongues of angels, for their retention. In Milton, Marlborough, and Pepys, St. Paul's have the greatest epic writer, the greatest soldier, and the greatest diarist and observer of contemporary personalities and events, that the English-speaking world has produced.

I felt then, as I do to-day, that a mistake was made in the excessive attention which was devoted to grammar which, although unquestionably important, is far from being the soul of the Classics. Vergil appeared chiefly of use as illustrating points in Kennedy's Latin Primer. But then, I daresay I should have found this state of things reversed, had I remained long enough at school to reach the Head Form. To Botting I owe much for his sympathy and kindness: what do we not owe to the genial and humane? Wainwright I associate with the choruses of Euripides. The dusty class-room melts in mist, and I stand within the City of Pallas, and watch the young girls with their needles, working upon the Goddess's saffron robe, the yoking-up of her chariot-horses; or embroidering the ground these tread on, with a cunningly-wrought tissue of flowers. The Muses I had glimpsed before through the eyes of the Elizabethans; now I was

privileged to behold them in their own Hellas, "treading delicately through the clearest air". In a word, I owe the public school I was bred at a considerable debt, and if, here and there, a page of mine commend itself to my critics, well, I passed my apprenticeship in the same workshop as the "English Augustans", in studying the limpidity, the rhythmic quality, and the weighty brevity of such writers as Tacitus, and Sallust, and Pliny the Younger.

After school, the vacation. I recall my first holiday abroad: "growlers" stacked high with luggage. The bustle of departure. Victoria Station, interminable suburbs, Kentish hop-fields and oast-houses, tunnels, more tunnels, suburb again, and now Dover and the glassy water, and the Castle upon its hill of chalk. The strange composite smell of the boat, in which the salt tang of the sea, mixed with a regrettable odour of lavatories, tar, hot machine-oil, and onion soup are all ingredients! Calais at last! And everything new; everything different; from the small paged newspapers so easy to handle, to the shiny, glazed hats of the *cochers*!

My father had not booked "sleepers", but with suit-cases to rest the legs on, and those excellently-laundered pillows which the old women dispense at Continental termini, we were comfortable enough. There was a Frenchwoman immediately opposite me facing the guard's van. Her daughter was on my right towards the engine. Whilst my father was conversing in French with the mother, I took pleasure in observing my little neighbour. Her age might be fourteen or fifteen. She was full and firm-breasted. I had never seen so many blonde ringlets on a head before. How far art might take a hand in their production, I was too young to speculate. Her eyes were blue; her skin of the whitest, and the consciousness that I was sitting next her produced in me a sensation so pleasurable as to be akin to pain. Our little encounter was innocent, idyllic, and absurd.

At last conversation grew languid, the hour for sleep arrived, and the shades of blue gauze were adjusted over the glaring gas-jets in their glass bowls, leaving the compartment in comfortable gloom. After a while my little girl was thrown a trifle forward by the jolting of the train, and I took courage to grip her arm to steady her. Soon she was asleep, her head sinking with the sway of the train, until it rested on my shoulder. How should I express my joy in this accident, if accident it were? I was terrified lest she should straighten herself up again, and

when the train rattled over the points, I slipped my arm about her waist, to confirm the gentle pressure of her warm body against my side.

From experiencing the disagreeable sensation called "pins-and-needles", my arm became as numb as a strand of rope, but a king's ransom would not have persuaded me to withdraw it! I suppose my little neighbour got a night's rest; for my part I "slept namoore than dooth a nyghtingale". I listened to her breathing, inhaled the fragrance of the perfume she had in her hair, caressed her small, firm breasts, and was absurdly, incredibly happy.

Morning brought a general stir. Somebody drew a blind, and I unobtrusively withdrew my arm from her waist. My little friend sat up, looked shyly at me for a moment, then with a trustful and conspiratorial glance, stepped smiling out into the corridor. I could still see her, at the open window now, her cheek acquiring a fresher tint of rose, her eye a brighter sparkle from the pine-scented air. The morning sun shone full on her, transfiguring her, and supremely indifferent as to consequences, she was letting the keen wind rush through her hair, until the quivering ringlets rode out the gale like a thousand and one blossoms in an enchanted Arcadia.

The mother awakened, and observed, no doubt, certain peculiarities about my appearance, as that my eyes were shining like stars and that my tie was over my right ear. From these phenomena she made presumably certain deductions, for after casting a witch-like glance towards the door into the corridor, and favouring me with another from the same bin, she observes in French, "The train always deranges my daughter's stomach. She has gone to the lavatory to vomit." Since her mother's seat and mine faced opposing directions, I was able to detect the lie. This incident gave me my first insight into that savage jealousy which older women often entertain for younger, even though the relation be, as here, that of mother and daughter.

Hills are appearing here and there now, infants of the Alps; rocky, precipitous, and unmistakably Swiss. I recall my first night in a hotel at Geneva, and the view from my bedroom window which overlooked that lake of incredible blue. I sat long upon the balcony before turning in, listening to the orchestra of a neighbouring café—there is so little public music in England!—the tawdry strains taking something of tone from the proximity of water.

Morning: and our small paddle-steamer chunking its way through the blue ripples, throwing flame from its bows and golden stars! The sun climbs high, and the green awning becomes a solace. Hun students assemble in a band. The cheeks of not a few of them exhibit scars from duels: broad weals to which the application of borax, to retard healing, has imparted permanent hideousness. They eye one another diffidently, then: sing! Strange that tigers should possess the gift of song! Byron's *Castle of Chillon* appears to port; sculptured from chalk, reflected in sapphire.

Déjeuner at the *Croix Blanche*: bathos, if you will, but what man doesn't love talking food? Tough and wise with centuries of good living, "Better pay the cook than the doctor", say the farmers of Normandy. And were we English to abolish our tinned rubbish, cease dehydrating vegetables, and revive the chops, steaks, and wine of half a century ago, many a patent-medicine quack would go out of practice. We have an excellent soup with a basis of potato and a slight flavour of onions, followed by spring chicken; but no bacon now, and no bread sauce. With the eagerness of a detective, I watch the waiter mix his three-quarters of a spoonful of tarragon vinegar, three full spoons of olive oil, a largish pinch of mustard, a smallish pinch of salt, and give a few discreet turns of the pepper-mill. Butter of the freshest, bread warm from the oven, cheese, and a good French—not Swiss!—white wine. A simple but agreeable meal, and eaten *sub dio* upon the open terrace, with the lapping of lake water at our feet.

Trient I remember, and its legends, and Vernayaz, and Brigue; city of one château and a thousand stenchies! And thence to Gletsch in diligences, the like of which to-day are to be viewed only in museums. I sit, with another passenger, on the box-seat beside the driver. The three seats—his and ours—being enclosed by a felt hood with glass windows. Having neither of us voices, the passenger and I sing all the way, and having no ear, the driver applauds. At one point, high up amongst the hills, a halt is called that our fellow may demand of a colleague why his diligence is there without a horse? Our driver returns from his colloquy grinning, as though at some surpassingly funny joke. He shows his white teeth.

"*Tombé de la montagne, n'est-ce pas? 'Ees 'orse vall from de eel!*"

Gletsch at nine in the evening: a lilliputian hamlet: a brobdagian hotel! Pine logs blaze upon the great open hearth,

and fill the air with the scent of resin. A high shelf runs the length of the four walls of the immense dining-room, and supports pots and drinking vessels of every type, in brass pewter, or silver alloy. The garden, the scant grass of which has been chilled by searching winds and scorched by the cloudless suns to the semblance of the lightest Virginia tobacco, is diversified by a scrub of bushes. Two tame chamois, tethered in this pleasance to pegs in the ground, pause in their browsing, to look at us. In the leaflet which mine host presses upon us, in which the amenities of the hotel are set forth, these attractive creatures are not forgotten. "The Park," I read, "for Horned Beasts is notorious." Is the landlord perhaps a student of Elizabethan comedy?

We rise at four in the morning, our destination Grimsel, and bathed in the rose of morning, through a gap in the hills, suddenly, the phantom sublimity of Monte Rosa confronts us. I am looking into Italy! I am aware that I shall lay myself open to the charge of bathos if I say that my emotion had for source, in some part, the Museum at South Kensington, that second home of my school-days. I am now thirteen, no age for analysis. I am looking, I feel, into the land whose giants created the things I love most in the world: the Donatello "David", the Venus of the Medici, the "Cupid" of Michelangelo! And then to gaze from heights across vast stretches of country, has always something of magic in it. The walls of the human prison recede. The soul acquires wings. One is half in Heaven.

On those days of atmospheric transparency which threaten rain, whilst viewing from the Cotswolds the blue hills of Wales, I have known this rapture. I have experienced it at Bruges, whilst gazing from the noble belfry, towards the milk-pale sea beyond Blankenberghe. As I looked across the flats towards Holland from the sister tower of Ghent, this happy expansion of soul has visited me, the willing victim of a witchcraft which defies analysis. At La Coupée, in Sark, above that ragged cleft which wellnigh divides the island in two, I have lain and watched the seagulls floating above and below me until, by a "willing suspension of disbelief", I could imagine myself dematerialised, and floating with them. But never did I experience this soul-enfranchisement so largely as when viewing ethereal Monte Rosa, through the blue air from the heights above Gletsch.

Meiringen left me with a colourful impression of snow, gentians and forget-me-nots; but Murren knocked me down with

a savage attack of appendicitis. Feeling himself inadequate to the task of performing an operation, a Dutch doctor dosed me with a whole pharmacopoeia of soporifics. I would sleep like an infant, and wake feeling like a Greek God. So often as I found myself looking forward a thought too eagerly to the next injection, I would ask him to change the drug he used, for young as I was, I was alert to the danger of becoming an addict.

"No, Doctor, I don't want any more morphia."

"Then I'll give you opium." He meant laudanum.

One minor incident from my period of convalescence still fills me with a sense of poignant regret. Hearing a babel of voices one evening, I asked the chambermaid what caused it.

"Eagles," she replied nonchalantly, and continued her brooming.

"What!"

"Oh! It's too late for you to see them, mein Herr, and I'm sure you oughtn't to get up!"

"Were there . . . how many were there?"

"Four."

"What were they doing?"

"Only flying over the hotel."

To this phlegmatic girl who cared not a jot for them, a vision of eagles had been vouchsafed. It had been denied to a poet.

Once when I had it in mind to go a journey and write a book of experiences, my friend, Major Hugh B. C. Pollard of *Country Life*, advised me: "Note down everything that strikes you as strange, immediately. If, in your new country, you find that the milkmen wear funny hats, write down, 'The milkmen here wear funny hats'. People are the same everywhere, and after a week the milkmen's hats won't strike you as funny!" I am not prepared to go quite so far as my friend. Temperament counts for much. The Spaniard greets his wife's lover with a stiletto, the Parisian with a repartee, the Swiss with an overcharge. And I have kept no diaries wherein to note down my reactions to such things as the milkmen's hats. Once only did I keep a note-book upon a holiday, with a view to jotting down travellers' impressions. This was in my nursery days, and I recall only one item: "Saw nuts in tree. Ate them", which rivals Tacitus for brevity, and Mrs. Glasse for unconscious humour.

A boy from another school and I went for a holiday in Normandy. We lost our luggage early and were delighted to be

delivered of this encumbrance. For a trifling fee, we became members of the "Touring Club de France", which gave one reduced terms at certain indicated hotels. Our maps unfortunately were lost with the suit-cases and as it would not do to demand, when in a town, what the citizens were pleased to call it, we examined sign-posts sedulously, or asked at its outskirts, "What town was that we were approaching?" Time and space were hazily conceived of by the field-workers, and the query, "How far is it to X, please?" never failed to elicit one or the other of these two answers, "Ten minutes", or, "Three leagues".

Sanitation—to-day improved out of all comparison with that of the past—was then at its primitive worst. Lavatory seats with a double perforation to accommodate two at a time, were the rule rather than the exception: why part good company? And they had frequently, for backing, a low window of plain glass giving upon the public street. The railway station of the provinces specialised in a lavatory which had but three walls; a den upon the floor of which were two bricks mortared to the ground, one on either side of a central hole. The front wall, as in a doll's house when the child is arranging its contents, was missing. Every now and again one would come upon a victim perched precariously upon the bricks, in full view of every man, woman and child upon the opposite platform!

"But what do they do at night?" I asked a porter.

"They give me a *pourboire* to hold a lantern."

So there were evening performances as well as *matinées*! I recalled a remark of Elam, our eccentric schoolmaster. In the course of a geography lesson, he astonished the form by throwing out apropos of nothing: "When I make use of a lavatory in France, I make a practice of singing *Vive Henri IV!* so that anyone approaching may know that it is occupied!" Now I began to see light in what had seemed to me then an uncommonly cryptic remark!

To-day, I find, French courtesy is regarded as something of a myth, and conceivably there has been a decline in manners since the carefree days of President Loubet. If so, it is regrettable, but my recollection is of a France where manners were as high as the sanitation was low. One example from many will suffice. After hair-cuts and shampoos at a village barber's, we boys, who were dusty after a long ride, asked: "Might we wash to the waist in the basins?" Our request must have seemed of the

oddest, but, for all that, he agreed with a "we might and welcome". Whilst we were splashing at our bird-baths, our barber-host remarked, "All we Normans love you English. For centuries we had the same kings!" I could hardly trust my ears! Here was a small tradesman in a small village, conversant with history, and courteous as a prince! Would a Frenchman receive the like courtesy, the like accommodation in an English village? He might in Devon, where politeness and geniality appear to spring as naturally as the flowers and fruit, but elsewhere? I wonder. Local gossip or the views expressed by his newspaper, and then, I fancy, the English village barber would find himself at the end of his tether.

For after all, what do we as a nation know of our own history? Or literature? A Swiss bookseller, at Montana, once told me, "I cannot possibly keep pace with all the new books, but I wish to have in stock all those classic books which every Englishman reads. Will you oblige me very much by compiling me a list?" The Classic English books which every Englishman reads? I had seen Guy de Maupassant and Balzac at one of the hotels which the French frequented. What should I find at *my* hotel, the guests at which were, almost without exception, English? I examined the shelves. There was no one volume which any self-respecting critic in the English-speaking world could have pronounced worth even five minutes of serious consideration.

"I had to take away Blank's book," an old lady explained, "I saw a *young girl reading it!*" What a test of classic merit! Nothing to be allowed that might prove unsuitable to the "tots"! Whilst I was examining the shelves in despair of finding anything whatsoever above mediocrity, Captain Blank came up and cried, "Hare! Isn't anybody doing librarian here? There doesn't seem to be a single Asterisk! I can't find *anything!*" Asterisk deals in sweet village maids, dressed by village dressmakers. They are wooed and, after dreadful trials, wed by Dukes. Sometimes this author varies his theme—for after all, one should not become a creature of routine—and betroths honest young chaps, with oil on their noses, to the delicious daughters of wealthy shipowners. These works are written in an English which even the meanest understand. Asterisk is extremely rich!

I explained the nature of my task in the lounge that night. A London Jew with a German name informed a French couple "that there *were* no English authors whom one need take seriously, except Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde"

"Have you ever heard of Byron?" I asked.

"Oh, and Byron; that's the lot."

"Or Shelley or Keats?"

"Oh, but you're a *specialist*!" he answered.

The conversation, since dinner was overdue, and it was not worth while to settle down to Bridge, took on an unwontedly literary turn. A lady enquired if Milton had not been "the blind fellow?" And the son of an Earl asked me if "I had ever met Coolidge?" I replied that I had not. I was positively assured later, that he supposed that the poet of the *Ancient Mariner* was named "Coolidge", and—more astonishing still—that he was *still alive*. I wonder does any other country in Europe exist where great writers receive less honour than they do in England? No nation—this will hardly be denied—reads so frivolously as our own. Nothing is more ordinary than to see well-placed and well-to-do Englishmen who read nothing that would tax the capacity of a sentimental schoolgirl of fourteen.

To return to my boyish holiday in Normandy. We viewed Château Gaillard, of which stronghold an enemy of King Richard I is said to have declared that "he would take it though its walls were brass", to which the King, who was quick with a retort, replied, that "he would defend it, though its walls were butter". To-day, they tell me, this beautiful monument, which forms the subject of one of Turner's water-colours, lies levelled with the ground, an early victim of Hitler's desire to save Europe from Bolshevism.

We bought cantaloup melons and devoured them by the hedge-side under the moon; put up at centuries-old inns, and slept in bedrooms of unpainted wood, but with floors scrubbed as clean as a man-o'-war's deck. We leaned over country bridges, and watched the darting of the emerald or sapphire dragon-flies, above the shadowy streams below. We found the men of Tankerville celebrating a feast-day. At the inn, we requested baths. Bowing low, mine host directed our attention to a species of tea-urn hanging upon the wall. It was furnished with a doll's tap, and a saucer to catch the drips. I explained hesitatingly, that I would prefer a bath, "I could get into". This struck our friend as so excruciatingly funny that he invited his entire household staff, which included four apple-cheeked wenches and a waiter, down into the hall with him, that they might enjoy the joke.

"Oh! *Do* tell these maids what you have just asked me, about the *bath!*"

Their laughter was uproarious, but without malice; the product of health and high spirits which must find a course. It did not leave one ill at ease. Beneath a trellis hung with jasmine and honeysuckle, we sat down to a super-excellent country supper, with everything fresher than fresh. The landlord brought us a pitcher of white wine made of oak-staves hooped in—barrel-fashion—with iron bands; and with a curiously ornamental iron lid.

And now, luring us to follow, the sound of music drew us to a stretch of common-land beside a river. The neighbourhood were there in force; the men in tail-coats, high collars, and chimney-pot hats. The surface of the ground had been prepared for dancing by the plucking up of the more prominent gorse-bushes, and the planking over of several rabbit-holes. No introductions; no formalities. Here beneath the last rays of the sun, we danced upon the greensward, with the sparkling-eyed, well-bodied country girls—their hair smooth, brown, and glossy as the new-fallen chestnuts—until I could fancy that I had been wafted magically back to the England of the maypoles. Four fiddlers—each with his private pitcher of white wine—redoubled their efforts as they reduced the liquor to a lower level, and nightfall brought a pleasing cool. One of the musicians was an old soldier with a wooden leg. All were distinguished by flamboyant neckties.

And now, as though roused from slumber by music, a great, round, foolish nursery-rhyme moon began to spy upon us. But first she surveyed her image in the stream, to see if she were looking her best, and were as likely as others to receive her tribute of admiration. Agreeably reassured, she stared at the grey-suited tourists, the wooden-legged fiddler, the flamboyant neckties, and the men in the chimney-pot hats, with rustic wonder; that identical, luminous eavesdropper who, in the far-off days of Mother Goose, espied their elopement when the "Dish ran away with the spoon".

As banker to the party, my elder companion outran the constable—he would hardly have been a schoolboy had he done otherwise. At Gisors, we were reduced to a five-pound note and one penny, three ha'pence. The innkeeper of this small place had never seen an English bank-note in his life. He protested, smilingly but firmly, "No want your cheque." He then sent for

the local genius to clarify the situation, an excellent fellow renowned for his grip upon our tongue.

The genius wore an antique pseudo-panama hat, with an excessively broad brim, and had obviously come from working upon the land. He had a shock of brown hair, and a torpedo-beard, and his face, neck, and chest—most of the last of which was visible through his buttonless shirt—were sun-baked to a hue between beetroot and mahogany. Having haltingly addressed a few words to us in our native idiom, he fell to regaling a growing audience with particulars of the diplomatic negotiations which had first taken him to our shores. My companion insisted that the genius's opening gambit was to observe that, through the courtesy of his friend, the Lord Mayor, he had been accommodated with the royal suite at the Tower. Now this is odd, for I gathered, if I caught the words correctly, that he had taken up his abode, *dans le Tooting: très chic*.

It became manifest that our friend in the panama was a *blagueur*, or conversational fantasist. Truth, prosaic truth, was no concern of his, he left such portions as they could grab of it, to the philosophers. To protest at the absence of so bourgeois a thing as veracity, when a *blagueur* is offering freakish sacrifice to the Muse of Conversation, would be the height of ingratitude. Is he entertaining? Then ask no more. He no more discourses, than a flute-player plays, to convey information.

By the kindly assistance of this intermediary, we succeeded in changing our five-pound note into something like its equivalent in francs; and this, although no soul in Gisors had ever set eyes upon one—or upon *us*—before! What a tribute to our national reputation for honesty! May we never do anything to forfeit it! But I daresay the Genius smoothed the way for us in this transaction, by representing us as boys of some consequence: co-heirs to the Duke of Norfolk, or drummers in the Grenadier Guards!

And so for Paris, and then for home! I have always had a quite unreasoning adoration for Paris, and think the Luxembourg Gardens in spring a soul-experience. London is historic, noble, and heroic, but it is also grim. In London, men live to work; in Paris they work to live, and surely this shows a better sense of proportion? As the train approaches the metropolis of well-planned squares and leafy boulevards; of statues, music, wit, and love, all begin to polish up. Ladies produce little mirrors which they anxiously consult. They pat their hair which the journey has disordered. The huge *cuirassier* on my left removes his helmet,

takes a "shammy" leather from his breeches, and publicly *scrubs*! The gentleman opposite fingers his tie, to make sure of the symmetry of the knot, when, leaning over towards me, he opens a conversation with, "You sleep with a French girl to-night? Yes? You English love our French girls; and we French love your English girls: we find them so *fresh*!" The whistle shrieks, drowning the richly reminiscent accents. We arrive and leap out into the bustle of the station. But as the slang of that day had it, *on à toujours à verser à Paris*!

Our store of francs, which yesterday appeared to be inexhaustible, has been cut into by the purchase of the two railway tickets; and then there will be the hotel which, to be on the safe side, we settle in advance. We saunter forth to dine. Having finished coffee, I discover that the waiter has hidden a five-franc piece under the bill, in the hope that we shall not notice it. I look at him, pocket the piece he has hidden, and hand him, by way of tip, a second five-franc piece which is apparently made of lead. We have been amusing ourselves by drawing sketches with it on the back of the bill of fare.

"*Mais! c'est mauvais!*"

"*Parfaitement; c'est pour vous!*"

We wander along the boulevards, so full of life and animation, turn in at last, and count the bank. Breakfast upon bread and butter, honey, and hot chocolate, and again we examine our resources. When we have paid breakfast, and given tips, the English penny-three-ha'pence remains: the French money has gone! This uncouth situation does not prevent our wandering into the Luxembourg Museum. I still have a recollection of that statue in mixed marbles—not quite a legitimate trick perhaps, but effective in its way—*La Nature se dévoilant*; and the spirited *Le vainqueur du combat de coqs*. Rodin, I fancy, had not yet come into his own; at least, had he been represented here then I feel sure I should remember it.

It was, I think, at this time: yes, it must have been, that posters were displayed upon the hoardings, representing Edward VII in caricature. One of these I vividly recall. It represented the royal diplomat as seated upon a cushion, a "sheet in the wind", and wearing a cocked hat made out of the newspaper *Paris Sport*. Naked girls before him were dancing the stomach dance. He looked well-fed, and happy.

Other caricatures of which I was only told, glanced with equal indiscretion, at the King's susceptibility. One, for instance,

represented him as hurrying President Loubet away to some unknown destination, observing, "I'll show you some little corners of Paris which you don't know"! And, of course, there was the classic sketch which portrayed him entering a back street, and being ecstatically hailed by crowds of urchins, with cries of "Papa"!

King Edward was, at this time, in Paris; though, cut off from newspapers, we did not know it. I remember very well the soldiers lining the streets, the crowds, and the open, horse-drawn carriage. But just when I was craning my neck to ascertain precisely whom it was that I was applauding, I heard a *poilu* beside me cry loudly, "*Ce soir! Jardin du Luxembourg!*" I turned round, caught sight of a pretty girl laughing down at him from a window, and when I turned round again, found that the open horse-drawn carriage, with the august visitor, had passed. This was, we were given to understand, "your English King, *le roi Edouard*"! And this incident would make me already fifteen: how fast time flies, even in a book! . . .

But a trifle before the hour for *déjeuner*, we realise that thought must give way to action, and we set out on a regular route march in quest of pawnshops, of *monts-de-piétés*, a word they had not taught me at St. Paul's: which shows how essential travel is to counteract academic influences. Alas! we walked, and might walk. We were to learn that to-day was the Feast of the Assumption, and though we tracked two pawnshops, both were closed. We stuck it out like infantry upon the last laps of an all-day march: stalwarts who still keep upon their legs, though too exhausted to whistle.

At last! A *mont-de-piété* which was open! We enter and, in my usual rôle of volatile Mercury, I explain the situation, and display our gold watches of Benson's own making. The pawnbroker looks momentarily at our watches; protractedly at ourselves. It becomes increasingly evident that, despite the politest of evasions, he believes we have stolen them! I give him the history of our watches. I explain that they were gifts from my grandfather.

"He must consider it; he must think it over. Were it not, *hélas*, a feast-day: in fine, *L'Assomption*. . . ." In fine: he bowed us out!

We emerged once more, conscious of a sense of extreme physical fatigue. At last, I said, "We must go to the Consul's and by taxi, because we can't walk any more; and he'll have to pay something, if only because he'll have to settle the cab!"

A second idea seemed preferable to the first.

"If Emile Bourdelin is still alive, we'll go to him."

(My parents being also on holiday, in Switzerland, and as they also were on the move, it had not proved possible to keep in touch.) I consulted a Post Office directory, and found, to my inexpressible relief, that the dear old fellow's name was in it. The end of our trials was in sight! We *hissed* in the style of the natives, and up came the *cocher*, glazed topper and all. Soon he was lashing his bony horse in the true tradition of these neck-or-nothing demons. Now he would graze the surround of some public monument; now he would mount the kerb, and the pedestrians would run for it! The Paris cabby of that day valued his own neck almost as little as those of his fellow citizens. But at last this continental Hellfire-Dick hauled at his reins, as though he would saw his horse's jaws in two, and brought us up with a jerk before Number 126, Rue Lafayette.

Emile Bourdelin had come over to England in my grandfather's time, and had transacted some legal business with him. An enduring friendship resulted, and the genial old Parisian had become from that time on, a species of heirloom in my family. He had been my grandfather's, my father's, and was now to prove my friend. He was both painter and poet. In the former capacity, he painted my grandfather, as a keepsake, a water-colour of his house at Putney, in the garden of which he represented my father and the paternal aunt, whom a maid-servant is seen addressing, in the stiff lace cap and cuffs of Victorian days. The legend beneath reads: "Tea Is Ready"! The style would be considered *sec* in the studio Paris jargon of that day, or "tight" in ours. But the Impressionists were still struggling for recognition. They had not yet fought their way to position or influence.

Photography was likewise in its infancy, and when compelled, through lack of means, to "pot-boil", Bourdelin would turn to, and sketch objects which our day would reproduce by some photographic process. Did an insect ravage the crops: some Victorian ancestor of our Colorado Beetle? The hairy model would be despatched to our friend's address in the Rue Lafayette, at the charges of the French Republic. Bourdelin would then sketch the villain, and this sketch would next be reproduced by some mechanical process, to be pasted up before the *Mairies en province*, that farmers might learn to recognise their Enemy!

As a young fellow, my father was staying with the Bourdelins as their guest, when just such a creature arrived, and greatly

daring, ventured, when the sketch was finished, to draw attention to a flaw in the Master's masterpiece.

"*Mais, Monsieur Bourdelin, si vous me permettez——?*"

"*Hein?*"

"You have given this creature two legs too few!"

"*Nom de Dieu, de Dieu, de Dieu, de Dieu!*" cried the disgusted poet. "It's all the legs that it will get from me."

The scientist in my father was outraged. He imprisoned the creature, which was seizing the opportunity to make its "get-away", beneath an inverted wine-glass, and at long last persuaded our friend to accord the odious model a second sitting.

Whilst at work thus, upon some routine piece of draughtsmanship, Emile Bourdelin would carol to himself whatever air chanced at the moment to come into his head. Soon he would be adding words here and there, until at last, he had fashioned his lyric. He founded *Le Caveau*, a poets' club, at which members declaimed their pieces, and cracked jests and bottles. Oh, France! Land where even your poor can drink good wine. You produced, in one and the same generation, Rabelais and Calvin! *Why*, when you might have exported Rabelais, *did* you discharge Calvin upon us? This was ungenerously done of you! A gallant nation should give of its best!

A contemporary thus pictures our friend and heirloom.

*C'est lui qu'on charge à l'improviste,
Au Caveau, de tous les emplois:
Un jour caissier, l'autre archiviste,
Il est, il fait tout à la fois:
Et quand à son tour il préside,
Le verre de Pommard en main,
Ah! qu'il est beau lorsqu'il vide,
Cé diable de Bourdelin!*

Although he was the friend of two generations of the Hares, I, of the third, had not yet seen him, and to arrive, shake hands, and demand money, seemed a mighty strange way of making my bow! I knocked, however, entered boldly, and explained, to his astonishment, who I was. I say "to his astonishment" advisedly, because neither he, nor his 'aged but still handsome and distinguished-looking wife, could follow my Pauline French! "Frenche of Paris", was to me, "unknowe".

Yet I could understand *him* perfectly. I still remember the poor old couple's bewilderment, and the Poet's agitated aside to

Madame, "*Allez! Cherchez le marchand de cravattes qui parle anglais!*" This put me upon my mettle. I assured him that he *would* understand if I were to speak slower. I spoke slower. He *did* understand. I was the son of dear Alfred, and charming Florrie. Crying excitedly, "One? Two? More?" he produced three gold coins, reassuringly stamped with the image of the Gallic Cock: it was gold in those days! Then—the business of the moment settled—Monsieur hugged us both like some mighty feather-bed: for he was "putting on weight"! Frenchmen were surely more exuberant then, before the blackguardly Hun had almost bled them to death, and as exuberant, they were represented, although with fabulous exaggeration, "*on the Halls*"!

CHAPTER V

PARIS AND OXFORD

MONSIEUR BOURDELIN shouted to Madame to make an omelette for *ces pauvres enfants qui ont cherché même les monts-de-piétés!* It seemed as though all the eggs of a roost were going into a pan, but we made short work of them. We drank wine and water—this last from the Seine perhaps? Should we survive it?—and now exceedingly happy, lay back in our chairs while the Poet mixed for us, with adroitness born of long practice, a *grog au Kirsch*. We drank the health of our host and hostess, and with prodigious exercise of moral and muscular control, refrained from bursting into song!

At the door, we discovered our still waiting *fiacre*. We had forgotten its existence! And now for the *Gare du Nord*! The workings of Nemesis are twofold. She balances prosperity with adversity; and adversity with prosperity. That our long-lost luggage should turn up again, from some obscure corner of a parcels office, was but an incident in this miracle of a night. We were asked seven francs for excess luggage, but the porter took three as a tip, and the *rusé* devil smuggled it through without our having to pay a ha'penny.

And now Paris is behind us, and Calais is reached, with its golden lights dancing in the water; and Dover, and Victoria; Waterloo, and home.

When last I visited Paris, I was on leave from the 29th Durham Light Infantry, and the year was 1918. The Poet had long been dead. I had postponed my duty-call until my last day of leave bar one. The concierge, I remember, informed me that Madame Bourdelin was now between ninety-two, and ninety-three. Leave had been exhausting, and I found this quiet visit restorative.

We talked of many things. The old lady who was very clear in her mind, informed me that the bombardment of Paris by the *Grosse Berthe* had proved her salvation, as it had forced her down into the cellars where, meeting with people who were kind to her, she had again acquired contact with the world. She invited me to dinner upon the following evening, when by way of giving an Englishman a culinary treat, she had obtained for me, Heaven

knows where from, a leg of mutton. It was red outside, and blue within, and wrapping a napkin about the bone of this dreadful delicacy, she enquired, "How do I peel dees ting?" But the claret was excellent.

I asked whose was the Venus upon the mantelpiece?

"The Venus of Cleomene," she answered, "to me the most elegant of all," and pursuing a train of thought by no means difficult to divine, "It is good of you", she said, "to look up an old woman, when Paris is packed with little sorceresses who would prize your company!" I did not, naturally, explain that it was this state of wizardry which *had* detained me, and that I was retreating from Paris as from the Brocken, to the Everless tranquillity of the front line. I *did*, however, make a mental note of the old lady's observation, to hoard it up, as a sugar-plum, for my father when next we met.

"Well, did you call on Madame Bourdelin?"

"Yes, Father."

"Did she seem pleased to see you?"

"Yes, I think so,"—casually—"she said it was 'kind of me to look up an old woman, when Paris was packed with little sorceresses who would prize my company'."

My father—"Ce cher Alfred"—(*Crossing, uncrossing, and recrossing his legs: a nervous trick of his which expressed exasperation*): "I should have told the little sorceresses to go to the Devil!"

How differently would life upon this planet have developed, had Adam adopted this forthright policy with Eve! I reminded Madame of her occasional letters to my father and the family, and told her how much we appreciated them. I refrained, however, from mentioning that her quaint, pagan variant upon the more conventional, "yours sincerely", to wit, "may your path through life be as smooth as a woman's flesh", had caused embarrassment when, interpreting in English for the benefit of the children, my father had been reading too fast for impromptu bowdlerisation. On such occasions he would exclaim, with an explosion of irritability, "Why *must* she write *that*!"

My old lady perfectly remembered the Franco-German war, provoked by the aggressive criminality of Bismarck. (At Hamburg, they showed me the ruffian's colossal statue, bidding me remark that the fingers of the conventionalised hands were a "metre long". I thought this reasonable. Two hundred million pounds' worth of francs Bismarck extracted from French purses. To be a pickpocket, one needs long fingers.)

Madame extolled the skill of the French cooks during the siege. They had rendered even vermin palatable. She had eaten rats grilled over the coals *en carbonnade*. Horse she never fancied: too sweet. But she adapted herself in time to donkey, and would find herself looking forward hungrily to a repast at which the long-eared victim was to figure in a ragoût. Wine the Parisians never lacked, but possessed in quantity until the very end of the siege; and as one expects from saints, St. Julian and St. Estèphe wrought miracles in keeping up morale.

Whilst the cooks were thus distinguishing themselves, the housemaids of Paris adopted other tactics. So soon as some fat Prussian detached himself from the herd—when the City had capitulated—it would be: "*Oh! mon Caporal, comme tu as l'air fatigué! Viens! some good soup will restore you.*" But the soup would have been adulterated with prussic acid, and the girl would be in the next street before the alarm could be raised. Sulphuric was a favourite ingredient. Hundreds of those *cochons de Prusses* were killed in this fashion!

As a keepsake of our dinner, the old lady gave me a novel, *Histoire de Gervaise*, which its author had dedicated jointly to her and her husband. Gripping my hands in hers, when she had given it me, she said, "*Une vieille amie à son jeune ami: je mets mes deux mains dans les vôtres!*" For she was *sui generis* in this quaint gesture as in all else, and had her own way of doing everything. I still have the book with its characteristically misspelt dedication to "Kennith Hare". The most scholarly of Frenchmen seem to have trouble with English names. Did not the "great Hugo" himself inform us that when in exile in Jersey, he had lived at a house named "Marine Terrace"? And did he not christen the English sailor in his *Toilers Of The Sea*, "John, Jim, Jack"? Odd that he failed to spell the last name, "Jak".

My old hostess spoke of the great men of that French nineteenth century, when she had known *le tout Paris artistique*.

Théophile Gautier had been her acquaintance and—poet to the last—polished his verses to the accompaniment of the Prussian cannonade. Some had criticised him for this detachment, but mind is better than brutishness, and to create is greater than to destroy. Paul Henrion, trivial author of delightfully absurd songs, was her frequent guest. Everybody at one time was singing or whistling his *Colinette au Bois*. You remember? The village Rose is frightened by a Wolf, which the opportune exquisite,

all powder, patch, and rapier, adroitly despatches. *So far*, the girl is safe.

Il n'y a pas d'mal à ça, Colinette!
Il n'y a pas d'mal à ça!

But the Jupiter Optimus Maximus of the Paris Pantheon was, of course, Victor Hugo. Yes, she had spoken with *le grand Victor Hugo*; seen him not once, but often. "My young friend, did I not tell you that I knew *le tout Paris artistique*? And she adds with warmth, "*C'était notre Shakespeare, celui-là!*" I should not have been astonished to learn that he was Sir Walter Scott as well, for Hugo nonchalantly incorporates a page of "Kenilworth" in his *Amy Robsart*.

Fearful of overtiring my kind hostess, I kiss her hand to take leave, but she bids me assist her from her chair—did I say that she was over ninety years old?—and we stand for a brief while at the door. We are at one of those poignant moments of life, when two people are conscious of possessing in common a thought which neither dares communicate. In this case the unspoken word is, "It is impossible that we should ever meet again!"

After a pause: "Why do you not marry?" she demands, abruptly.

"One must make money first, Madame!"

"*Oh, écoutez Kennett*, one need not be a millionaire to marry! We were never rich, yet I was excessively happy with my Emile."

All of a burst, below us in the street, a barrel-organ shatters the silence with Mimi's song from *La Bohème*. The old eyes flash with unexpected fire.

"*J'adore ça*"—she exclaims—"cela me parle d'amour!"

But I have anticipated, in my desire to round off this sketch-portrait of my father's old friend. Now I must resume the thread of this narrative.

After St. Paul's, a coach merits brief recollection. His house was in one of those sombre streets which abut upon that part of Hammersmith which most fancies itself West Kensington. Orchard—so I will call him—was a character. Life unfailingly outstrips art and nobody who came upon Orchard in a book, would credit the author with having found him in reality! But although in eccentricity he out-Elamed Elam, he was excellent at imparting knowledge. So soon as he entered the classroom, a strange thing happened: a smell of eau-de-Cologne

penetrated to its farthest corners. The class swore he drank it as a breakfast beverage!

At eleven o'clock, as a concession to their tender age, the two youngest boys were given a break of a quarter of an hour. At such times, Orchard performed his most rococo trick. Pulling a couple of shillings from his pocket, he would tell them, "Now, I'm going to a wedding in a day or two, and I shall want two wedding presents. Here are two shillings. Will you each get me one?" The boys would depart and return one with a pencil-holder, and the other with a handkerchief, or what not.

"Yes," Orchard would say, "I think you've chosen very well. Thank you!"

Being delayed, on some occasion, I reached Orchard's during the boys' break, and came upon one of the pair, a lad of twelve or thirteen, endeavouring to "pick up" a lady of forty or so. Though essentially simple, his technique demanded audacity. He walked up the street and down; up again, then down again. And so often as he passed, he ogled her. When she turned her head away, he walked all round her so that, at one moment or another, he could not fail to catch her full face. He was a good-looking boy and once despite herself, the victim smiled at his assiduous impertinence. But the break lasted only a quarter of an hour, and the siege had to be raised. The cavalier had to return to vulgar fractions. He re-passed for the last time, and with a gesture of theatrical despair, misquoted at her from *Hamlet*—"Methinks the lady doth protest too much!" It was then that she smiled.

Metal plaques were attached to Orchard's railings which bore these words:

STREET MUSICIANS PROHIBITED

After contemplating this thoughtfully, the identical youth who had constituted himself "bandmaster" when at St. Paul's, had an inspiration. "I have ordered a barrel-organ," he informed us, "to come every morning, and play beneath Orchard's windows. Half-a-crown if he just comes and plays; five bob if he puts up a fight! Put your money in the hat . . .!"

The following morning, I was reading Vergil with our professor.

"Go on, Mr. Hare,"—"Mr.," mark you: we were no longer inky schoolboys—"read the passage first, to get a general idea of the meaning."

"Very good, Sir."

"The oars are broken and a great sea is about to strike the galley broadside on. Read."

“*Dat latus ; insequitur cumulo praeruptus aquae mons !*”

“Yes; but don’t shout! I like your enthusiasm but not so loud, please!”

“Sorry, Sir! *Hi summo*——” Then music from without! The room is permeated with the saccharine strains of the air which accompanies the words:

“You are my honeysuckle,
I am the bee!”

“One moment, *please!*”

Orchard strides to the window. Laughter from his class.

“Will you go away? Can’t you see two notices, each with ‘No Street Musicians’ on it?”

“I want to suck the honey
From those sweet lips, you see!
I love you——”

Orchard strides forth to battle. As the musician glances apprehensively towards the window, the “bandmaster” holds up five fingers, to signify that active opposition must be offered,

“Ain’t I as good as you, Gov’nor? Aren’t I a citizen, sime as yourself? Don’t I pay my taxes in every pint I drink?”

“Here! be off with you.”

“What call ’as the likes of you to come it over the likes of me? Snatching ’is bread from the pore man’s marth?”

Screams of laughter from the form! From the wide open window, the “bandmaster”, who can laugh silently, offers grave encouragement. After the twentieth threat that he will send his servant for the police, the desperado withdraws mumbling, not without a covert wink to the window, to signify that he will come early the following morning, for his fee. The tutor returns flustered, and after a brief interval in another room, he re-enters, and again—or is it fancy?—the room is scented anew with eau-de-Cologne.

After Orchard—“a betrousered Peri who had wandered out of Paradise”, as he once described himself to me—my family went to Switzerland for a short holiday. After three weeks, they returned home, but left me for a week at Comballaz village in the Vaud Canton, to recuperate. For I was still slightly weak from a recent operation for appendicitis, but more so from the systematic undersleeping of many years, the result of the excessive quantity

of homework given us, which could only be done by sitting up half the night.

The only other visitor at the hotel when my parents left, was a German student whose cheeks bore the scars of three duels; although he may very well have fought others from which it was his opponent who emerged scarred. The virus of pan-germanism was doubtless already working, but the disease had not yet declared itself so openly as to make the Teuton odious. They had not yet set up their skull-and-crossbones religion of Thor and Odin, against the gracious European tradition derived from Greece and Rome. Doubtless they regarded all but themselves as heretics, but the French alone *knew* them, of the other peoples of Europe; and that from bitter experience.

To the rest of Europe they were known chiefly for their comic egotism which would show itself in such exclamations as, "You should do what *we* do!" and the like. And, of course, for their table manners; for paring their finger nails over the soup; for combing their hair over the fish, and so forth. A Hun at our table d'hôte helped himself, first, liberally, and his wife, second, frugally, to all the dessert. He left his fellow-diners the china dish with its agreeable pattern. But by now all the other guests had left the hotel; I suppose the season was wellnigh over, and Fritz and I were left alone.

Fritz had none of these faults. He seemed to me, at least, a jovial, if bellicose, cosmopolitan, of no fixed abode: a citizen of the world. We fraternised at once. He knew no English, no French, and I no German. I tried him with schoolboy Latin. He replied at once, and for a week we conversed in a style which served our ends, though doubtless it would have made Cicero sick.

"*Visne ambulare, amice mi?*" Blond Fritz would ask.

"*Profecto hercle!*"—By Gad, we will!—for it was always to a café where wine of a sort was obtainable, that our steps led us. Our youthful palates were not discriminating.

"*Spectaculum magnificentissimum!*" Fritz would exclaim, indicating with a theatrical gesture the sun-flushed peaks: "Glorious view!"

But whatever the goal we proposed for our walks, the *taberna vinaria*—"pub"—was that achieved! We found Latin a good language to drink in. Seated in the open—so would, I prefer always to eat and drink—beneath a trellis of clinging vine: *Nunc est bibendum!* we would cry in chorus—Landlord, fill the flowing bowl!

I had read little Latin at St. Paul's, for I left school early, but I could call to mind a world of tags at will, to help me out with a conversation. This was to be expected for, even at an advanced age, my father believed he could have quoted the whole of Horace's third book of Odes by heart. Where is my genial Fritz to-day, I wonder? In America, perhaps, having acquired the English of Uncle Sam if not of Shakespeare.

I recall another youthful holiday—at Le Havre, this time, where I met a little Normandy peasant girl—one could hardly call her a *bourgeoise*—who meant much to me. She was on the arm of a man when I caught sight of her, and they were leaving a local music-hall after the show. She had absolutely black hair which contrasted strikingly with the clearest blue eyes imaginable, and her cheeks were rosy without trace of make-up. Her skin was of the milkiest white.

So intent was my gaze that a thought-transference occurred, and she looked to see who was looking at her. The man on whose arm hers was resting paused, wondering no doubt what made her hang back. She hastened forward lest he should see me, for she had caught my eye and we had exchanged glances. How I searched for her, evenings and all day long! Three days elapsed without my seeing her. I made a confidant of a Russian staying at my *pension*. He agreed willingly to help me in my quest, and together we must have searched every bar and café in the town. Had she left Le Havre? It looked like it.

My Russian friend H—— was a gambler, and had sworn not to return home to his country until he had made enough at the tables to do so on his winnings. Every time he visited the Casino it was to lose afresh. He would help me to find my inamorata; rest from the tables would do him good. A complete break: and his luck was sure to turn. We renewed our investigations. I was in despair. In sympathy for my plight, H—— introduced me to a host of fair acquaintances who did not look to virtue for their advancement in life but, if there be any meaning in the word, I was in love. Let me explain. I was suffering from an obsession. I could think of nothing but her; my thoughts were no longer under my control. At night, I dreamed of her.

"Well, my poor friend," said H—— one evening, "she has left the town! This is absurd. I have brought to see you 'Toinette.'" "*Toinette, voici un monsieur fort convenable!*" But a liaison was impossible. I clung to the dear image in my mind. I hope I did not seem boorish. I ordered a bottle which my new friend and I

cracked. We laughed and: I frankly confessed my state of mind to her. I found her both understanding and sympathetic. Women adore confidences, and a baffled lover is sure of ultimate happiness, if only he can secure one of the sex for his ally. I described my fleeting vision, with a prose-writer's level-headedness, no less than with a poet's enthusiasm. 'Toinette would have done her utmost to help me, of that I have not the least doubt, but she assured me that she had never set eyes on the girl I was describing.

One evening, at least a week after I had first caught sight of my obsession, I was at dinner at the *pension*. We were an incredibly mixed company. There was, for instance, the English Consul's private policeman, who knew as many proverbs as Sancho Panza. He was for ever putting into halting French, such things as, *Nécessite est le mère de l'invention*, with the accent and intonation of the Sergeants' Mess. Not a soul understood him. Men looked nonplussed; women frightened. There was also *Monsieur le Vicomte, Le T—*, a lively devil in reduced circumstances. The remainder of the visitors were French folk on holiday: *Le tennis, voyez-vous, on ne le joue pas sérieusement! C'est un sport flirt!*

Above the middle of the dining-table, hung an oil-lamp, which threw light upon plates and dishes, but left the extremities of the room in darkness. How comfortable were those days of *the lamps*. Beneath the electric light of to-day, never a mouse would dare stir from its hole. But: *then!* Within the golden circle of the *glow* were security, good cheer, and wit. Beyond it were the dusk, the indefinite, the unknowable. One saw the skirts of the infinite. And both the gloom and the glow were rendered more poignant by the imminence of the other.

The large sash-window had been closed. The wooden shutters had been fixed over it. And the heavy rep curtains had, in turn, been drawn over the shutters. Our dining-room and the street beyond it belonged to different universes.

Suddenly I realised that a curious thing was happening. I saw Clothilde—that I was to learn was her name—with her elbows on the spaces between the spikes of the iron railings which shut off the basement of our *pension* from the street. Her cheeks were resting in the palms of her hands, and she was gazing up at the dining-room window. I saw her through the rep curtains, through the closed wooden shutters, and through the darkness beyond the circle of light cast by the lamp. Obstacles had melted away like morning mist. I rose from table without uttering a

word—No *Permettez-moi, Madame?* to the Hostess; no *Bon soir, Mesdames: Messieurs,* to the company—I felt as though, if I spoke to a soul, I should be breaking a spell. I sensed them all staring at me in astonishment when—rather after the fashion of a sleep-walker—I walked without a syllable from the dining-room.

Fearful lest I should break this link which was drawing me on, I took stick and hat from their pegs in the hall, almost without looking at them. I opened the door, looked out: and there she was, in the exact posture in which I had seen her but now! Still with her elbows resting between the spiked tops of the railings; still looking up at the window. I expect nobody to believe this. But it is true.

"I have been searching the whole town for you!" cried I. "And I for you!" she replied artlessly.

It was a case of trekking out to a suburb where she worked as a young nurse to some children, and of creeping up the stairs in stocking feet. My lord Chesterfield, of letter-writing fame, would have regarded my little friend as "trash", but all's in the point of view. As an eighteenth century diplomat, he had to acquire the lustre which converse with the world of feminine elegance brings. He had to be well with the society which he adorned. He advises his son to go to bed, as to a school of manners. But who ever expected a poet to be respectable? They expect him to write poetry! And when eventually he settles down, and studies seriously to be a good citizen, they all declare, "What an agreeable surprise!" My little friend was a masterpiece of Nature, and had she sat to a sculptor, might well have inspired a masterpiece of art.

Another reminiscence from Le Havre has less of poetry in it. I had swum out to the bathing-raft, one bitterly cold morning, and got into conversation with a swimmer who was already there.

"We are the only two who have attempted to reach the raft this morning," said he, "as you see they're all keeping to the shore; well within their depth."

"But usually a good many come out here."

"Usually, yes; but not when the wind's in this quarter. There's a strong outward current to-day. You must be a first-rate swimmer," he continued. "I've won a good few medals myself, but I don't altogether like it."

On this consoling note, he dived suddenly and made for the shore. "Well," thought I, "I'll attempt to follow him. If I

find I can't, I'll go all out to get back on to this raft, and once here again, I'll signal for help."

I dived. The current swept me past the raft, and out to sea. I determined not to shout: that, I thought, would be undignified. Nor did I. But I kept waving my arm, and at last, to my inexpressible relief, I saw a long-shoreman putting out towards me with a boat. Never, did it seem to me, did man row so slowly since history began. The water seemed to grow colder, as I grew weaker. The devil of it was that there was nothing to fight! One couldn't hurt this icy abstraction which was slowly choking the life out of one. One couldn't strike, lunge, or slash. Just die, in the creature's own good time.

The boatman reached me at last, and hauled me in, only semi-conscious. At my bathing-tent, they brought me hot water for my feet, and I heard somebody say in French, "Give him this *Bénédictine*!" The hot water and the spirits of which I fancy I must have drunk at least half a tumbler, revived me completely, when—to my astonishment, I own—a waiting barman demanded to be paid for the drink!

After this excursion abroad: Oxford, where I grudged the loss of liberty, and loathed the necessity I was under of being in before midnight. Amongst my recollections is one of a day with the "O.U.V."—Oxford University Volunteers—and of plunging into heroic warfare with the sister university when, after a strenuous day of marching, countermarching, and sniping in furrowed fields, those gallant gentlemen our opponents, entertained us to tea in the Corn Exchange. This meal I have always regarded as a model of what a military tea should be. There were bread, cheese, butter, veal-and-ham pies, a York ham in all its splendour, a barrel of beer, and: *no tea*!

When the Volunteer gave place to the territorial system, we were disbanded, but first presented with records of service; showy memorials on Bristol board, surmounted by the Royal Arms. Beneath the flamboyant Lion and Unicorn, were blank spaces, whereon the volunteer was to inscribe his "Campaigns Served", and "Decorations Awarded". It never occurred to me that there would be any practical advantage in keeping this record as credentials, and fascinated by the virgin whiteness of my scroll, and inspired by Heaven knows what clownish goblin, I filled it in thus:

"Covered the retreat of his sacred Majesty King Charles II, at Worcester. (Last out of town)."

"Brought chop, port, and the Sunday papers, to his sacred Majesty in the TREE. (Garter at 'Restoration')." I had reason to regret this ineptitude when asked for my certificate of volunteer service, on applying for a commission in 1914. I destroyed it hastily, and explained that it was not to be found.

What other recollections come back to me from my year as a "fresher" at Oxford? A good many! One has to do with a tow-haired youth who was being badly ragged, and came to me for suggestions which might be of help to him.

"They came back last night," he concluded, "made me stand on my table in pyjamas, with a bottle on my head, and broke every clay in my collection of churchwardens, throwing them at the bottle! It never stops, this sort of thing, I'm going half crazy through want of sleep!"

"Look here," said I, "you do this. I saw the other day in the market, some small tin boxes with glass in front, and with perforated lids, containing grass-snakes: absolutely harmless. Get a tin box, a grass-snake, and half a dozen kinds of enamel, and paint the damned creature all the colours of the rainbow! Put it back in its box, and fix on a label with some horrible scientific name, followed by POISONOUS in large letters! And I think I should mention in Hall, that you are interested in snakes, and going in for studying them. Say that a fellow you know in the tropics, has sent you a rare specimen, and that you are keeping it under observation. Then you know, when these merry gentlemen arrive, you can take it out, and put it through its paces!"

The victim of the intrusions was a queer fish. He habitually spoke slowly, and in a rapt voice. He belonged, I believe, to some strange religious sect.

"I'll try," he half whispered, with his gaze on a passing cloud, "it may be a good idea . . .!"

"Well? How did it go off?"

"Marvellous! I labelled the Thing's cage, *Anguis Maculosus: Guiana. Poisonous*. Oh! and I added one other detail to your scheme: rubber gloves! When I heard them coming, I put the gloves on, and took *It* out! Your plan worked"—his voice, at this point, became almost trance-like—"marvellously! Thank you." This singular youth who, by the way, was a born actor, was never ragged again. He developed a technique. When back from a field-day with the O.U.V., he drew his bayonet, and observed to one of his recent raiders—always in the slow rapt

voice—"Don't you love the way it gleams in the light of the moon?" There were no more midnight incursions into his rooms. It seemed hardly worth risking an abrupt demise, through snake-bite or bayonet!

There was a sequel to the snake. A Don who had rooms above our friend, sent him a polite note by his scout, to this effect. "Mr. W— sent his compliments to Mr. B—. Mr. W— knew nothing about snakes, except that Cadmus and Hermione were turned into them. Could snakes *climb*? He begged to invite Mr. B—'s attention to the fact that his—Mr. W—'s chimney connected with that of Mr. B— in the room below. Since it was summer, and no fires lighted, he conceived it possible that the snake might emerge into his room by way of the fireplace. He had had a nightmare in which this had occurred. Mr. W— therefore entreated that Anguis Maculosus might be sent about his business." Though worded with ironic courtesy, the request was in, effect, a command. The reptile was set loose in the Parks. And there the snake threw her enamell'd skin: or was free to do so: hideous spectacle for a diner-out!

Guy Fawkes Day was the traditional *Lupercalia*. All the firing in college would be purloined for bonfires, together with lavatory seats, and even banisters from the staircases. Once, on the "morning after", a strange thing happened. A scout I did not know by sight, brought breakfast.

"Hullo!" said I, "what's happened to Williams?"

"A little misunderstanding with the police, Sir. They—er—ran him in."

"What on earth for?"

"Only for helping to put a cabman's shelter on a bonfire."

My first experience of an Oxford "binge" was disillusioning. From all that I had heard of students' foregatherings on the Continent, I had imagined that there would be good songs and good singing. The themes would be wine and love, no doubt: or what was the use of being young? I fancied we should have Elizabethan lyrics, Herrick—who knows?—Peacock perhaps. But imbecility alone found favour, or if that be too strong, nothing was sung that would not have gone down well with the most provincial of gallery audiences. There was a song which began—

Float me, Charlie,
Charlie float me
On the briney sea!

And so on: stuff for sentimental servant-girls. And the mournfully bellowed:

Herring boxes
Without topes,
Sandals were to Clementine.

And "Pollywollywooly", than which, I take it, aesthetic cretinism can no farther go. And it had never occurred to anybody to discover first whether the singers could sing! The Elizabethans sang, and their songs remain models of poetry and sparkle. The Puritans with their caterwauling weavers, broke the tradition. Perhaps the B.B.C. who have often given us our beautiful English folk-songs, will re-establish the prae-Puritan tradition.

In many ways, I found that Hugh Kingsmill's reactions tallied with my own. He had not been prepared to find the sports obsession as universal at Oxford, as it had been at our respective public schools. We both lamented the vandalistic destruction of ancient buildings in the very heart of Oxford which, it seemed, no serious effort was being made to save; although money was always forthcoming if it were a question of erecting a cricket pavilion. Some half-dozen ancient shops, half-timbered, and with projecting stories, disappeared from the High Street, during my own brief period as an undergraduate, to make way for an extension to a college. It would have been as easy to incorporate them into the scheme of the new building as to destroy them. It would have been more effective too.

Tramping on glorious summer afternoons, through the superb pastoral country which surrounded the city—now alas! buried beneath whole square miles of brick and mortar—Hugh and I would indulge in utopian satirics as to how the city might be regenerated. Scholarships for painting and sculpture. Inspiration to be sought from the bucolic night-life of the pagan Gods. Wine-halls—wine at cost price to undergraduates—where over bumpers of Venetian glass, the Great might talk. Gold medals for lyrics. Pretty women towards whom the Dons appeared to entertain some unfathomable aversion, to be lured into the city by means of beauty competitions: gold crowns to be publicly distributed as awards.

Whom should we appoint to the influential office of Chancellor? This demanded thought. Whom dared we trust, from ancient or modern history, with the uncrowned kingship of the new-born city-state? We decided upon Caesar Borgia. He would

liven things up. The chancellorship should be made hereditary in his family. His disposition towards poisoning those with whose views he felt out of sympathy was regrettable; but he had been the patron of Leonardo which seemed to put all square. A few bigots, a few pedants—a teetotaller, a professor of petrology or so—might fare the worse for his laboratory. But he wouldn't doctor anybody *interesting*: anybody who *mattered*. He wouldn't poison US!

Swimming and boating were now my favourite recreations. When our bathing-place, "Parsons' Pleasure"—a loop of the lovely Thames which was set apart for men bathers—was shut for the winter, I would strike off the padlock with a brick. So often as a new lock replaced the old, I had resource to the brick which I kept concealed beneath a bush, and regarded as my latch-key. I bought a Labrador about this time, a beautiful thoroughbred creature: the dog of my life! I made a practice of taking him to the river with me, and chaining him up.

I shall never forget the occasion when he broke his chain, and with a longish length of it still attached to his collar, swam out to join me! He was a strong dog, but the chain, made of thick links, was too heavy for him, and frightened and exhausted, he kept attempting to support the additional weight by placing his fore-paws on my shoulders. So often as he brought off this feat, he sunk me below the surface, and he was too flurried to allow me to come sufficiently near him, to unhasp the chain from his collar! A north-easter blew; there was a skim of ice upon the surface, which tinkled as one struck out. I began to wonder if it were my destiny to end my life in the Thames.

One over-exercised habitually in those days, an indirect effect of repression: the unnaturally sexless life. I remember tramping with a friend from "Queen's", in the course of which, having no map, we lost our way. I daresay we had gone twenty miles of stiff cross-country foot-slogging and scrambling when, in a state bordering upon exhaustion, we came to a farm. A flock of guinea-fowls presumed that we were there to feed them! With a vile squawking, they came gabbling towards us through the deep mud, and fell to pecking at our ankles! Footsore, dog-weary, my mind flew back to those devils in queer guises, with which the Flemish religious painters confront their St. Anthonys! I recall too the aspect which the "Upper River" began to wear for me about this time, as of some pallid water sheet of the Infernal Regions! I fancy that for the first and last time of my

life, I was becoming slightly morbid, the immediate effect of the academic fiction that sex does not exist.

We reached Oxford at last, having informed ourselves as to the route, at Guinea-fowl Farm; and sank into two of my friend Mackintosh's arm-chairs. He called to the maid for crumpets, and, "*Now for tea!*" he cried, producing a cork-screw. The wine was port. An expression of disillusionment overspread his features as endeavouring to fill our tumblers a third time, no drop came out.

"Can it be," said he, "that like Mr. Pepys, we have 'cracked' this bottle?"

About this time, a tall blonde provided the very necessary escape for a monk *malgré lui*. Existing became living, and monotony ecstasy. The Stygian marsh of the "Upper River" underwent a change, and became anew a branch of the sweet Thames, and guinea-fowls, severing for ever their connection with St. Anthony's devils, strutted: phoenixes!

Away in the country, beneath the centuries' old bridge which spans a tiny stream, my new friend and I discovered a hollow recess where the stones had fallen away, and into which, with some difficulty, two persons could just contrive to squeeze. To the neighbourhood of this sanctuary we would retire, and into it we would vanish precipitately, if "bullers" appeared to take too close an interest in our activities. Here we would crouch beneath our arch, the toes of our shoes a bare inch from the water's edge; and sometimes submerged: but what did either of us care about *that*!

Her speed of foot was our salvation, for despite the encumbrance of her "picture-hat"—how that dates one!—she could run at incredible speed! Sometimes, holding the famous hat in her left hand, she would grab my wrist to pull me forward, her hairpins loosening one after another, till the tangle of her yellow locks shook free, and they billowed out behind her like a flag! One lovely May night, secure in our hide-out *beneath* the bridge, we heard a "buller" immediately *above* us on it. An altercation ensued. He had followed us hot-foot, and was now demanding of three courting rustics, "If they had seen us, and, if so, which way had we taken?"

The yokels who had seen us go to ground, bade the intruder begone: though not precisely in that language! Their invective, which they enriched with the coarsest oaths, was so redolent of the soil that my little friend was seized with a paroxysm of

laughing which must infallibly have betrayed us, had not a swan threatened to attack us, which frightened her into sobriety. Fortunately the bird then revised its intentions, and sailed from beneath the shadowy arch and out into the open moonlight. The "buller" departed as heavy of heart as of boots! We proceeded to straighten ourselves out. I emerged from my screen of yellow tresses which, so closely packed were we, had flown down as much over myself as her. Clambering stealthily up the bank of the stream, we surveyed our unexpected and welcome allies who had sent the pursuer packing: three young toughs with their girls! They grinned and nodded, and their girls laughed. . . .

How well do I remember the days of that first fatal clipping of women's locks! I never met a man who didn't execrate it. Could one conceive of goddess, nymph, or fairy with close-cut hair! The new mode brought women more nearly to resemble men; it was an approach to hermaphroditism! In *public*, the newer fashion showed tolerably well: but *that* was not the point! I was in Switzerland when first I saw a "bobbed head". Both the new and the passing mode had their advocates, and debates became heated.

"Long hair," declared a then modern woman, "gives out a smell like that of a wild beast! *Je déteste cette odeur de bête fauve!*"

"*J'adore ça!*" my young friend B—— almost shouted.

Stays went about the same time; *that* nobody will regret! One no longer embraced a palisade.

"*On sent que c'est une femme!*" observed my first uncorseted partner at a dance.

CHAPTER VI

OXFORD AND AFTER

WHEN I went to Oxford, the reaction against Victorianism had reached flood-tide. It is difficult to imagine to-day the veritable detestation with which the young fellows regarded the epoch which had so recently closed.

"Even Swinburne", a youthful contemporary of mine declared, "couldn't *blow away* the *bad air*!"

I do not say that they were right. I do say that that was the attitude. Thus the newcomers on the stage would argue: "What in the whole intellectual field had the Victorians ever taken seriously except science?"

"What was their wit?"—"Acrostics and puns!"

"Their art?" "Pictures which told stories. And generally with a sentimentality only fit for drunken tarts! So much dull perfection of technique, and nothing on God's earth to express with it!"

"Even colour in men's dress—that legacy of all the ages!—they had proscribed!"

James Elroy Flecker, I remember, wrote a satire in which the male characters wore black shirts to match their clothes; and my friend A. P. le M. Sinkinson, of Wadham, possessed and treasured, as a curiosity, a manual of etiquette for men, composed by some mid-nineteenth-century Petronius Arbiter, which opened, "Nobody except a cad, ever dresses except in black!" The disfavour with which that age came to be regarded it brought upon itself. The prevailing temper of the times had been scientific and—despite the Victorian giants in literature—imagination was suspect. The artist was thought of as a queer creature to be patronised: a fellow who—though not an utter fool perhaps—yet preferred to ignore the main current of thought and erect his pavilion beside a backwater. Now it is the age which most honours the arts that receives most honour from posterity.

The young sprigs, in Oxford and elsewhere, were determined to bring colour back to male attire, and force Pickwickian plums and bottle-greens upon the affrighted bourgeoisie. I met Ion

Swinley, my old St. Paul's friend, the Shakespearian actor, percolating through Piccadilly in a lounge-suit of high distinction, in beech-leaf russet. But the "Great War" snatched victory from the sartorial and other aesthetic reformers; and to-day battle-dress and the Dalton reach-me-downs alone survive to us of the pageantry of the ages!

Arthur Bell, of the *Manchester Guardian*, who opened his volume of Sussex Verse with a poem which he dedicated to me, alone put in a word for the Victorians. He was older by several years than the generality of undergraduates. He observed, "The Family Bible was no more in evidence than the port; and it did not affect its flavour adversely". Arthur had an intimate friend in Stephen Phillips, whose verse plays, sumptuously staged by Beerbohm Tree, were the last of a great tradition. Phillips arrived late at Arthur's one night.

"Every pub will be shut, Stephen," says Arthur, "it's too late for spirits!"

"We faintly trust the larger hop!" retorted Phillips, which is good punning: if punning ever can be good. The Oxford of my day was richly endowed with "characters". Lady Dons, and undergraduettes have forced those unruly men into a tailored and manicured respectability; and the human comedy is the loser. There was "W.H.", for instance, a Don with an assured income, and handsomely appointed house, the pictures in which are the envy of expert appraisers. He never had his windows cleaned, avoided window-boxes of geraniums in Eights' Week, and in many other matters practised an uncomely thrift. He would divide the sole which was his invariable breakfast-dish neatly across the middle, telling his scout, "The other half for breakfast to-morrow, Williams."

Once, when the Master's household were taking in coals, Williams thoughtlessly left the precious half-sole in an exposed position. A coal-heaver snapped up the delicacy and put it in his pocket. Distractedly Williams unburdened himself to the College Chef: a lordly functionary who could only be tipped with gold. "Nothing to worry about *there!*" cries this gastronomic princeling. And cutting a fresh fish across, he presents the new half-sole to the now radiant Williams.

"Oh! *thank you*, Chef!"

"All through breakfast," declared Williams later, "Master kepted peeping at me, and peering at me, till I could have *roared!*"

“‘Williams,’ Master says to me at last, ‘why were they *both* head-ends?’”

And then there was the “Britter”—short for “British Working Man”—a soubriquet afforded him by the extreme singularity of his attire. He claimed that he never walked, except to the Union Club, and had his trousers cut accordingly, not for *walking* but for *sitting*! No need to pull his trousers up before sinking into an arm-chair. His legs were encased in voluminous triangles of cloth, the bases of which were at the waist, and the apices, shorn of their points, at the ankles. Instead of that uncomfortable thing, the starched collar, the “Britter” sported a muffler, contrived from material so rough, that many, in good faith, maintained it to have been cut from a bath-towel. This singular character was, in fact, a Hebrew coach, a man of courtesy, conversation, and hospitality. The “Britter” was never seen to read anything but the newspapers, but for these his appetite was insatiable. Left wing, or right, mattered nothing to him: so it were meat from Fleet Street, he swallowed it all! When he had no pupils to attend to, the “Britter” would sit the live-long day in his nest of newspapers, whence he was never known to budge, not even, said the gossips, to attend a call of Nature.

Once before a Union debate, during that “Private Business” which gave the facetious their opportunity for letting off squibs, a member addressed the President thus:

“Mr. President,” said he, “are you aware, that the cosiest smoking-room chair is used by the ‘Britter’, for bedder and sitter, and if you disturb him, he’ll swear?” The speaker’s well-feigned air of exasperation side-tracked the house; but they laughed when they realised that the heckler had couched his complaint in the limerick metre. Caricatures of Oxford personalities were the vogue, and the “Britter” in his trousers figured frequently of course.

Another sketch represented two Dons conversing, the one a rhapsodist, the other a cynic. Both are academic veterans.

“Do you know,” says the rhapsodist, “my dear wife has presented me with a little boy?”

“Ah!” says the cynic, “whom do you suspect?” A quip which, a great many years later, found its way into *La Vie Parisienne*. Edwardian Oxford cultivated wit, as when, reporting a Union Debate, Hugh Kingsmill observed, “The speaker entertained grave doubts, but not his audience”. It was said

that the Oxford Union offered the most difficult assembly to address in the whole of England, not even excepting the House of Commons itself.

When the musical comedy, *The Arcadians*, was presented at the theatre, a singular accident occurred. A live horse was brought upon the stage, and the music and bright footlights rendered him restive. When members of the beauty chorus endeavoured to tranquillise him, the result was the reverse of what they had intended: it became disconcertingly evident that the noble creature was by no means indifferent to feminine charm. When recording his impressions in the *Isis*, the dramatic critic observed that "Although the cast, as a whole, is excellent, the palm for the best performance of the evening must go to the horse, who sustained to admiration the tradition of the great Toole". The critic was summoned by Authority, admonished, and fined; but the laughter was general.

Sweet was, I believe, the original of the phonologist, in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. The Professor had a theory which, if I understood it correctly, amounted approximately to this: many of Chaucer's obsolete words were still in use in the dialect of rustics, in the remoter English villages—bear in mind that we are back in the prae-war, prae-cinema, and prae-radio days—and that the men who used Chaucerianisms were even then aged men. "Why," the Professor argued, "should not the slow-going ways which retained the obsolete word, or phrase, not retain also the obsolete pronunciation?" If they *did*, why then, Professor Sweet had surprised the secret of much of Chaucer's pronunciation.

"There was no slurring of the words, no gabbling, no urbanisation. The ancestors spoke deliberately. Why not? Their cities were small, and men's lives upon the whole were more leisurely. Chaucer's Londoners were linked up with the Continentals more than is generally supposed. The Plantagenets, for example, were of French extraction, and many a rich aristocrat had lands on both sides of the Channel. Their vowels were more open."

"Do recitè, Sir; then we shall get a clearer impression."

"Oh! no."

"Do, Sir!"

"Do you really want me to?"

"Please!"

So the Professor takes his stand upon the hearth-rug. He is below middle height. His face is gnarled, puckered, furrowed.

He is almost blind. His voice is singularly sweet. He proceeds with deliberation and gives to each vowel that openness and fulness which, according to his theories, it must have possessed in the far-off days of King Richard II. In this fashion we hear, as *contemporaries*, Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*. The entertainment is for those who love the poetry of the supreme humanist of the Middle Ages—the poet who would have been our Shakespeare, had we not had Shakespeare!—it is specialist's fare admittedly; but since it is to be met with nowhere but at Oxford—the Oxford of that day—it is unique.

As we leave the panelled room in the "High", a venerable chamber worthy of our venerable host, a "buller" advances with the formal, "Mr. So-and-So would like to speak to you, please!" We are "progged"; that is, the Proctor on duty demands, "Your names and colleges, gentlemen!" We are to see him at nine next morning. The trouble is that we are not wearing gowns, as demanded by the University regulations. But since we have been visiting a Don, by special provision *ad hoc*, we are exempted from conforming with the rule . . .

Rupert Thompson—later to receive "Honours of the First Class" in English, and the offer of a Fellowship, constitutes himself our spokesman.

"So you were 'Visiting Professor Sweet', eh? Now who may this 'Professor Sweet' be?"—the Proctor's tone is sarcastic.

"The only Oxford Don who has a Continental reputation," replies Unruffled Rupert.

Despite this polished impertinence, the fine is remitted. I recall one occasion at least when Authority was outrageously flouted. It was after a literary dinner and we were strolling down the "High", when a "buller" approached the gownless diners-out with the Classic summons:

"Mr. So-and-So would like——"

"Oh! *you*——" observed a poet who was quick with his fists, and with a straight right to the chin, he laid the unfortunate man senseless in the gutter.

None wait the upshot of that grievous knock,
But speed like goblins from a crowing cock!

A list of members was demanded of the Club, and "cooking" began. The Secretary headed the Club's list of Members with the names of three Dons; genial old darlings who had toddled

round for drinks, and to grace the exuberance of youth with the dignity of Eld. Some very occasional members who had long ceased to attend meetings, were reinstated, by reason of their reputation for unimpeachable respectability. Last but *two*, the culprit figured; *last*, or even last but *one* might have raised suspicions!

I was at Carfax, Oxford, when I heard the proclamation of King George V. The "Edwardian Age" was officially at an end. It had been a good age, if to be English be good for Englishmen. It had recaptured the indigenous current of the national life. It had been as English as the days of the "Regent", of Queen Anne, or of Elizabeth. The full-blooded love of sport and of the open air was there; good wine and cheap, and the pubs open till midnight, and all Sunday, and then, beer that was beer! There was amongst the upper, and upper middle classes, a wide-spread classical culture, and not a little wit, and the rule was still essentially by aristocrats, with a virile freedom from bureaucratic and pettifogging control. We still possessed that liberty of which to-day, whilst we fight for it abroad, we are cheated at home.

Yes, the Edwardian age enjoyed liberty; we have not had a sight of it since. The earlier age of Victoria, on the other hand, like that of its prototype Cromwell, was a sport: an exotic. Both derived their judaic bigotry from Calvin, that agreeable Frenchman who abolished the feasts of the church, whilst retaining the ancient custom of burning alive.

With a view to studying uninterruptedly for my final at Oxford, I spent a month in Brussels. My host was a gentleman of ancient family, one of whose ancestors at the Renaissance, in what capacity I forget, had quelled a riot in Antwerp. Another forebear, an anti-clerical, turning satirist, composed in travesty the life of some fictitious saint to whom he attributed, amongst other miracles, that of restoring to a lady of liberal principles, her lost virginity! With my host, I would play *écarté* upon the evenings when I did not go with his son Edmond to the *Palais d'Été*. We two conducted ourselves with the utmost propriety but, as was natural, not a few women of the town would endeavour to inveigle two young men, and their technique gave us many laughs. When a woman was too old to be any longer attractive, she would put up the younger ones to point her out as having been "a friend of the late King Edward": a bold if brazen attempt to acquire glamour by attorney!

One night at Brussels, I had an odd experience which, for want of a better word, I might perhaps call "psychic". I dreamt that I was composing a lyric, but on waking up, dismissed this as a dream and gave it not another thought. In the morning, on getting up, I looked in a drawer for a tie. Not finding the one I wanted, I turned them all out, to go through them one by one, when I came upon the poem, in my own handwriting, on the paper which lined the drawer! The handwriting was my normal hand, and there was but one slip of the pencil: I had spelt "transmutably", "transmutantly", which I might have done if working quickly in my study when wide awake. Except for this one word, the spelling of which only I corrected, I introduced the lines unchanged in my volume of verse, *Green Fields*. They are those entitled, "Winter Night". I had before this, on rare occasions, dreamed a poem entire and transcribed it on waking; but never before had I read as though for the first time, *awake*, a poem which I had both composed and written when I was actually—for want of a better word—*asleep*.

Another out of the way experience. Back at Oxford, I had fallen asleep one evening when suddenly it seemed to me that I was at our house at Twickenham, in my mother's bedroom. Looking about, in astonishment at finding myself there, I noticed various vases of cut flowers. This was unusual, as I knew that my mother thought it unhealthy to sleep with cut flowers in her room. I was still in my pyjamas, and I pinched myself hard, three times, with a view to wakening myself up. The pinches hurt: but there I still was. Realising that something must be wrong, I took three strides towards the foot of the bed, when my mother turning round, her eyes quivered, and the thought struck me: "She is waking; if she wakes and finds me here, she will be terrified!" With a real physical effort, I forced myself to wake, when I found myself back in bed in College. I rose and dressed, and without waiting for breakfast, set out for the station. The day was Sunday, and the train the usual dog-train that one associates with that day. It was a quarter to one before I entered the garden, found the front door which gave upon the garden open, and rushed upstairs.

"*I was expecting you!*" said my mother.

"What are all the flowers for? I thought you thought it unhealthy to sleep with cut flowers in your room?"

"Yes; but the Aunts sent them, and I didn't want to offend by not having them in."

"But what's the trouble?"

"I'm going to be operated on to-morrow by Bland Sutton. I strained myself carrying your father's forge."

My father was making some experiments at the time, which necessitated the use of a small portable forge.

So this was the meaning of the call . . .

The immediate success of my slim volume, *Green Fields*, made both myself and my friends suppose that I had already "arrived". The reviews of all the critics were laudatory. None dismissed the book without some reference to my "delicate art"; my "economy and precision of phrase"; or my "distinguished sense of form". The *Westminster Gazette* described my work as "lovely and haunting".

The "English School" at Oxford was devoted only in part to the study of literature; a good half was given over to philology and obscure mediaeval dialects. With these I had as little to do as might be. I declined absolutely when—with something the air of those enterprising gentlemen who offer "curious" post-cards for sale in foreign ports—a young Don approached me and entreated me to learn Gothic! *Goths!* the foes of civilisation! At *Oxford*?

"But Sir, what is there to read in Gothic?"

"A fragment of the Gospel of St. Mark."

"But we possess the *whole* of it, in admirable English!" A wag unearthed a German commentator, Herr Bugge, who had views upon mediaeval English dialects. This humorist's technique was of the simplest. He would find some view ascribed to Herr Bugge, and ask the Don "who advocated that view?"

"Sir, who was it who suggested that the quality of the vowel 'e', in Thirteenth Century Wessex was &c., &c.?"

The Don would smile at this proof of interest in his subject.

"Bugge!" he would reply.

He never suspected a ribald jest, and his Yorkshire accent made his answer sound most unacademic.

I would look at the pedant who was prepared to fritter away a morning of bird-song and sunshine, inviting our attention to the errors which had crept into an Anglo-Norman homily, in the course of its transcription by a bored English scribe, and I would wonder if he had ever been young; if he had ever joined in a rousing chorus, or ridden a horse, or cracked a bottle of burgundy, or enjoyed the sun upon a May morning, or lost his

head over a girl. I came to the conclusion that he never had. Not to philology, that academic oakum-picking, had I given my heart. I was the servant of the Muses. I took honours in the second class, in consequence. But Sir Walter Raleigh, the then holder of the Chair of English Literature at Oxford, assured me positively that I "might regard myself as having achieved the *highest possible on every literary paper.*"

At this I had aimed, and with this I was content.

So Oxford lay behind me! I left with a reputation for poetry which was by no means confined to the University; but the question now was, what to do for a living. Before entering the "English School", I had begun to study Law, but my father persuaded me to relinquish it. Now that I was down, he refused to allow me to train for medicine. I had an allowance of two pounds a week. So often as I pressed my father to allow me to study for some profession, he would reply vaguely, "Oh! there is *always* time to specialise", a dictum which may have been philosophic, but which in an age of specialists and cut-throat competition was destitute of practical common-sense.

That my younger brother should be outstandingly my father's favourite was inevitable. He was interested in such practical things as engineering, as was my father, and was therefore, from the very first, put upon the right road to earn a living. That my elder brother would be placed was equally certain, for he was an object of glamour to my mother, who would exclaim, if I asked her what some young fellow whom she had met was like, "Oh, good-looking, you know, but *not* like *Maurice!*"

I took a short course of instruction at a theatrical training school in Gower Street, for I had, about this time, vague thoughts of writing a comedy, when some first-hand acquaintance with the theatre from the inside would have been a valuable preliminary. I played "Edward" in "The Voysey Inheritance" when at this academy, and Granville Barker, the author, looked in to see us play. I remember him well, lolling on the settee which did duty for orchestra stalls. Now and again he would lie at full length, and a moment later, half sit up, and grasp his ankles in his hands, a posture less suggestive of a popular dramatist and actor-manager, than of Puck! My performance pleased him by its naturalness, and he told me:

"If ever you take up acting professionally, I will make it my business to see that you are never out of a job."

But I had no idea of adopting the stage as a career; only of studying stage-technique. I secured a walk-on part at the "Arcady", and a small speaking part after this, at the "Idyllic". At the Arcady, I fell in love in good earnest. I suppose this was inevitable. To what extent are we humans masters of our fate? Opinions seem pretty equally divided. The poet Appius believed that "everybody was the artificer of his own fortune", but Petronius Arbiter adopts the directly opposite view, namely that "Fortune above us, administers our affairs!" There is room for both points of view in a world so extraordinary as ours!

"Jacqueline"—let me call her by that name—was Irish; tall, dark, brown-eyed: not blue as one might assume from her nationality; and her figure was superb. I fell in love with her in that desperate fashion of the young, and though I can afford to laugh now at the state to which she reduced me, it was certainly no laughing matter then. My pay was insignificant, yet, if there were but one cloud in the sky, I would take a taxi for her lest she should be wet! I lost my last suburban train back as regularly as the clock, in seeing her home. On these occasions, I would sleep in the waiting-room at Waterloo Station, tipping a porter to call me in time to catch the early workmen's train at four in the morning.

When I migrated from our parental home at Twickenham for Chelsea, the same thing happened. I would walk home, the four to five miles, after an exhausting day's work. Sleep I reduced to a minimum in this fashion, and food also; for I put my slight store of money into dinner or supper with my enchantress. Even so, I remember one occasion when I had just too little—Oh horror!—to pay the bill. I gave the waiter a handsome tip to buy his allegiance, and letting Jacqueline out, hurriedly explained the situation to the manager, an Italian. The sublime man smiled, shrugged, and proffered me a pinch of snuff! A thousand years of culture were expressed in that gesture! I daresay he had watched the comedy with melancholy amusement; had seen it acted on a hundred odd occasions, by a hundred other couples, and was perfectly aware of the difficulties of my situation. Somehow, Heaven knows how, I made good the deficit another day.

For a goodish while, everything seemed to me to be going better than well. Yet I could never persuade her to marry me; for I loved *en tout bien et tout honneur*. Then things began to go

backwards. Once or twice, in conversation, she let fall the word "Montie". Another suitor presumably was wedging me out, but as I never saw him, I succeeded in putting him out of my mind. One night, at her mother's house, whilst I was begging her to reconsider the situation, I heard a step outside the door, and opening it suddenly, was in time to see the Irish parlour-maid scurrying away downstairs!

So she had been eavesdropping!

I begged Jacqueline to take steps to prevent any recurrence of this outrage, and her answer both astonished and disgusted me.

"The poor girl gets so little to amuse her, and really, what can it matter to *us*?"

So then this was not the first night! The spy had been there perhaps many nights, with the tacit connivance of her mistress! Oh, *that was impossible*! Yet, so it was! I had not in my green youth even begun to fathom the psychology of the born actress. Make-believe was Jacqueline's reality; reality her make-believe! Better her maid for audience than none at all! Jacqueline was still on the stage. She never left it. Although sickened and revolted, I endeavoured to make allowances.

She smoked a great deal, yet never seemed to draw her cigarette, when once alight. I began at last to realise that she *disliked* tobacco, and only *acted* smoking! She would half recline upon the sofa, with her head upon the cushions, and with her almost blue-black curls lying in premeditated disorder, would give herself up to a highly conscious reverie, whilst the grey spirals from her cigarette rose one after another towards the ceiling. She would look wistful, romantic, voluptuous. The pose showed her chin, of which she was not a little proud, her straight nose, the outline of her bosom. She had studied the effect, I doubt not, scores of times!

At one time, despite her entire artificiality, I would be carried to the seventh heaven of enchantment; then disenchantment would set in, and I would sink into abysses of despair. "Montie"! It seemed to me that, on the occasions when I was losing ground, she mentioned him more often. "To-night," I would say, on these occasions, "we'll have our last little dinner together. We'll break off this intolerable situation, but part the best friends in the world."

"But I don't want to part," she would say, "I don't want you to go!"

One night after supper, when she had invited me back to the flat, we noticed a light under the drawing-room door.

"Curious," commented Jacqueline, "Mother usually turns in early. I suppose Bridget has forgotten to switch the lights off."

As we entered, a man in early middle-age advanced to meet us. He was a tall, good-looking, virile Englishman; not an actor, for he was dressed, not toggled-up; nor a soldier in mufti: he walked with that ease of movement which suggests muscles supplied with sport rather than drill. It seemed to me that he must possess every good quality which a reasonable woman might look for in a man. What my feelings were may be imagined.

"Kenneth," said Jacqueline, "let me introduce you. You *have* heard me mention Montie, haven't you?"

Very much the gentleman, very much the master of himself, the stranger poured out the whisky.

"Say when?"

Two courses were open to me: to drink his whisky, or knock him down with the bottle! It is only on films that they do the latter. After all, were he not her accepted lover, he would not dare to behave as though he owned the house. I did my damndest to show myself a man of the world—there was no man less so in London!—and I am sure that Jacqueline enjoyed herself thoroughly. She had an audience of two men whose emotions she could so work on, that they would have dearly liked to cut one another's throats. And Jacqueline could lie back now upon her cushions, as languid and voluptuous as you like. She could smoke her play-cigarette, and display her breast and body-lines through the sheeny silk of her evening frock, in nudity rendered ostentatious by clothes. It was a scene: a situation. *Picture! Hold it there! Curtain!* Oh! No doubt she enjoyed herself. . . .

It is small wonder that women generally oppose the introduction of the nude upon the stage. It is so decent; so decorous. The "Venus of Milo" is a thing for reverential delight. But clothes are bawds. They suggest, they entice, they are all provocation. Fascination is born of artifice. Strip a woman of her clothes, and you deprive her of power.

"You have been making yourself ridiculous, Kenneth! You looked at Montie as though you wished to eat him! I can have what friends I like, I suppose?"

"Yes, Jacqueline, but I have been dead straight with you. You know how serious I've been all through. I've asked you to marry me time and again. I'm not jealous"—transparent lie!—"but were Montie not your lover, would he dish out the whisky as though this whole place belonged to him!"

"I suppose he feels he has a right to, in a way."

"'Right'! What right?"

"Well . . . he's my husband . . . didn't I ever tell you?"

Sick with disillusionment, sick with duplicity, I walked down to Chelsea through the driving rain. And yet, for all this, I could not, such was her power over me, summon up the courage to break. I took her to Hampton Court once, and we spent a long summer day upon the river. Once she came over all literary, and gave me a novel by Jane Austen. Montie had drifted away again. Jacqueline was in a new play. What part? Upon my soul I forget, but I seem to remember her in carnival attire, in a scene which represented a town in *fête* time. The absurd business trailed on, and on. I had long placed my charmer mentally in the category of mermaids, creatures endowed with a sovereign excellence of beauty, but not with heart or soul. Strange that love can persist when esteem is dead!

A casual word gave the *coup de grâce*.

"Jacqueline," said I one evening, "I haven't seen Montie since that night at your house. What is he doing with himself? Doesn't he come to see you now?"

Jacqueline's look was vague, as though she were fishing for some memory from the forgotten past, sunk fathoms-deep in the subconscious.

"'Montie'?"

"Yes, why, dash it, *your* Montie?"

"Oh, *Montie*"—her tone was absolutely nonchalant—"he's shot himself."

Having by this time made such first hand acquaintance with the theatre as might serve my turn were I to try my hand at writing a comedy, I turned to journalism to supply the needs of the moment. In the small room behind Dan Rider's bookshop, in one of those narrow cross-streets which connect Shaftesbury Avenue with St. Martin's Lane, I met, at one time or another, Middleton Murry—late of Oxford and the Milton Club—Katherine Mansfield, Major Haldane Macfall, Frank Harris.

I did not, I regret to say, meet Richard Middleton, the poet whose verses Harris would read superbly, and praise generously: though assuredly so far at least as technical mastery of metre goes, to praise Middleton too highly would be impossible. He is one of our flawless poets. I remember well Harris's reading, in his rich base, and sonorous accents, so as to give full value to the music of the verse, that thing of Hellenic perfection, "The Bathing Boy".

Frank Harris, "Frankie" as he called himself, and the set adopted the nickname, gave me his novel, *The Bomb*, and an inscribed copy of that academic masterpiece, *Shakespeare and his Love*. He also wrote me a letter of introduction to the Editor of the *Academy*, a review which stood high in public estimation, both for its critical articles and the quality of its verse. Lovat Fraser was likewise a member of our coterie, already in repute as an illustrator and designer, and shortly to achieve fame with his costumes and settings for *The Beggar's Opera*, at Sir Nigel Playfair's theatre, the "Lyric", Hammersmith. Lovat illustrated my slim volume, *Three Poems*, and himself published it, conjointly with his brother Alan.

About this time, my old college, Wadham, invited Lord Birkenhead to a banquet, in honour of his being created Lord Chancellor. One of the Inns of Court was chosen for the affair, and both the political and academic worlds were represented. Sir John Simon spoke adequately and dryly, but the Guest of Honour delivered himself in characteristically sparkling and emotional style. Had such parts of his speech as were obviously impromptu, been taken down, and printed without the alteration of a word, they must still have ranked as polished and classic performances. Lord Birkenhead's gifts would have won him more fame as a contemporary of Pitt and Burke, than at the dawn of the "brave new world", where the demagogue maintains but a bowing acquaintance with the elements of English, and the philologist studies, from the Strangers' Gallery, the dialects of the shipyard and the mine.

In the course of his congratulatory address, the Warden of Wadham chanced to observe that "Lord Birkenhead was the College's *second* Lord Chancellor." I could not refrain from reminding "F.E." that if he were Wadham's *second* Lord Chancellor, I was their *first* poet! For the hour was late, and I had forgotten Rochester. Provoked by my quip, an irascible gentleman, who had overheard my comment, observed with *brio*,

"He's recommending himself to the only other man in London who is as brazen as himself!" Tickled by what he obviously considered as a happy impertinence, Lord Birkenhead said, "Send me whatever you've been doing last in verse, and I'll do my utmost to boost it." As I have already mentioned, Lovat and Alan Fraser had then just published my unpretentious gift-book, *Three Poems*. I sent him this accordingly. Sure enough, the whole edition rapidly sold out. The publishing price had been modest: sixpence; but so much as ten and six was soon being offered for stray copies, a record for modern poetry.

The hospitality of that most genial couple, Mr. and Mrs. Haldane Macfall, afforded me at this time, not a few delightful evenings. It was Macfall whom Oscar Wilde had consulted as to how best to employ those extraordinary talents which he knew himself to possess. Macfall urged Wilde to write comedies, and thus secured for the British stage the first dramatist of outstanding merit since Sheridan. As a writer of comedies, Wilde is to be ranked incomparably higher than Shaw. Except with a few early comedies, Shaw's technique is weak to the point of slovenliness, and his characterisation so feeble that he seems less to present us with men and women, than with bloodless puppets. And then, to pursue the comparison, Wilde never sinks the dramatist in the agitator, to bore us with tedious propaganda.

A Jack of comedy, but a Master of Advertisement, that is how I see Shaw. Nobody ever had a greater belief in his own value, or expressed it with a more assured insolence. Few men judge; but all are capable of receiving impressions. Shaw used to remind me of *Straton*, in *La Bruyère's Caractères*. "He said, of himself: 'I am witty. I am courageous!' And everybody said after him, 'He is witty. He is courageous!'" And without for one moment impeaching him of insincerity, it was impossible not to remark that Shaw never failed to exploit the current fashion in politics, so soon as it was in the sure way to realisation. Socialism and feminism, with all the inherent defects in those systems, had been already well-nigh achieved by mooning Morris and muddled Marx, before Shaw blew his bugle and declared war upon their opponents. The wisdom of the "Fool" in *Lear* was his: "Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill . . . but the great one that goes up the hill, let him draw thee after."

But a Wilde comedy—although much that had a contemporaneous appeal is lost with the passing of years—is still assuredly as much a work of art as is a Greek vase. Shaw was applauded as a prophet by the whole tribe of rebels: addle-headed utopianists, political malcontents, frustrated spinsters. Wilde, as an artist, depended for his appeal upon men of taste, discrimination, humour, wit; not wit, as with Shaw, degraded into a weapon for use against his political opponents, but wit etherialised into the spiritual flame of Will-o'-the-Wisp, whose wandering and unexpected spark lends a touch of gaiety, even to mud-flats and the night! When Wilde produced a comedy he paid London a compliment.

"Kenneth Hare," wrote Haldane Macfall to Austin Harrison, "is a genuine poet and such are somewhat rare. I wish, when he is with you, you would give him some guidance as to the way to find publishers, if you can." The soul of generosity to younger writers, it was due to Macfall that Austin Harrison printed my idyl, "Salmacis", in his *English Review*, as also the "Rhapsody of Air" which, when later it appeared in the volume, *New Poems*, a critic compared not unfavourably with Shelley's "To a Skylark". Harrison also printed an excellent review of my verse translation—at that time, the first—of the fourteenth-century dialect poem of genius, "Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight".

I had begun this rendering as early as the opening of September, 1910. I kept it by me, revising and repolishing—yet bringing it, as I believed, nearer with every touch, to the spirit or letter of my original—until at long last, in 1916, I submitted it to A. H. Bullen, of the Shakespeare Head Press, who accepted it. I took the Early English Text Society's facsimile reprint with me, to work upon during holidays. Not a few of the woodland scenes of my original I translated in the open, in the Dixcart Valley, Sark. Others I composed in the garden of a chalet at Sévrier, on the shores of Lake Annecy. I worked at night also. Once when I was jotting down lines by starlight, with a view to copying them out fair on my return to the house, a clergyman of the Reformed Church of France—till then I had not realised that there was such a body!—came into the garden where I was working, and fixed a conversation upon me.

"The City of Geneva," he began to boom, "once, as you know, the headquarters of Calvin, has become, in our time, a hotbed of debauchery!"

"Yes?" said I.

"There are no fewer than three bawdy-houses!"

"Ah! Indeed."

Profound silence fell, which the poor man employed in probing the Heavens with sad eyes, as though he were seeking for some object which he had mislaid amongst those glittering constellations. Coming out of his trance at last, and inviting my attention to the Milky Way, with a denunciatory gesture of the umbrella he was carrying, he burst out with, "And the peasants of this locality are so abysmally ignorant, that they *still* believe that those stars we behold had their origin from drops of milk which, they suppose, fell from the Virgin's breast, whilst she was suckling the Child Jesus!"

"What a nuisance!" said I.

I return to the history of my "Gawayne".

1 Perham Crescent,
West Kensington,
London, W.14.

Dear Hare,

I congratulate you on your—I don't like to call it a paraphrase any more than I would call Fitzgerald's "Quatrains of Omar Khayyam" a mere paraphrase—shall we say reinterpretation of the fine old English poem. Unfortunately, I do not think the daily Press has the insight to appreciate the subtlety of the thing, far less to appreciate the fine achievement. But I would advise you to take it personally to a man who does appreciate fine achievement in verse, Austin Harrison of the "English Review"—tell him I sent you, if you like—and ask him to review it in the magazine.

Yours sincerely,

Haldane Macfall.

Within a few posts of this, a second letter followed, for me to take as credentials. It contained this just tribute to Austin Harrison, "*You are one of the few who still keep the fires burning on the altars.*" This second letter he again followed with a third, so innately chivalrous a man was Haldane Macfall:

Dear Hare,

When you go to see Harrison, ask first if he is in. Don't waste the introduction. Keep it until you find him in. I leave the letter open; but seal it when you have read it, if you approve. I don't know quite what best to say, well as I know him, to influence him.

The times be all awry these frantic days; and one scarce knows what path to follow. I wish I could give you guidance; but I stand bewildered at the parting of so many ways, for forward and beyond there stand the crowds of

the sheeplike and academic and precious . . . Every dam prig judges literature, and the vogues arise, last a snow-time, and become mud. I go my own way . . . so I am a bad guide to success as the market-place accounts success. So there you are! We "catch on", or we miss the catch. God knows! . . . I suppose something will emerge triumphant out of it all. Perhaps it will not. You never know. So 'tis best, not only as an artist (whether of words or colour or sound) to be oneself and hope to God that one day the blatant may listen and the empty be filled. That's about all one can do. Here's luck any way!

Yours sincerely,

Haldane Macfall.

CHAPTER VII

TURMOIL AND ESCAPE

THE success of "Gawayne" was immediate, and it was reviewed in the most unlikely places. *Country Life*, for example, gave a full-page article, quaintly entitled, "Knighthood and Tall Deer in the Fourteenth Century". The *Occult Review* detected in my poem, "that touch of mystery", that "everlasting quest for the Cup of transfigured agony and light"—although the "Grail" was neither mentioned, nor so much as hinted at anywhere in this robust and joyous romance of "Merry England"! The *Daily Express* came nearer the mark, declaring, in jolly farmer-like fashion, that my "Arthurian romance" gave "possibly the earliest account of a country house party ever penned". On the score of the detailed descriptions of mediaeval costumes, *Vogue* recommended me to all its readers who were in search of a "really effective fancy dress"; in an article which, although light in touch, suggested the hand of a man of letters acquainted, at first hand, with my original. That the *Morning Post*, *Observer*, *The Scotsman* and the *Athenaeum* should review me, might be taken for granted, but I had to make quite sure that I was awake when the argus-eyed Durrant sent me clippings, relative to my "Gawayne", from the *Gentlewoman* and the *Finance Chronicle*. The latter found my translation *a great feat, and my achievement with Middle English as fine, as that of Professor Skeat with Anglo-Saxon models*.

Professor C. H. Herford gave W. B. Yeats and myself half a column apiece in the *Manchester Guardian*, and followed this up, in my case, with a personal letter, which concluded with the wish that I would "*continue to pursue this kind of work, thankless as it must often prove.*" Clement Shorter was amongst my most sympathetic critics. The Nietzschean Superman—who has since turned out to be only the perennial Hun in a rococo disguise—was much on the *tapis* in those days, and his possible advent was ardently discussed. In a delightful review of "Gawayne", G. K. Chesterton parenthetically admitted, "*Subconsciously at least, I should be much less surprised if Arthur were to come again, than I should be if the Superman were to come at all!*"

Sir Henry Newbolt informed me that, on a first reading, he assumed that my translation could not be accurate by reason of its fluency, but that, upon a second, he had compared my rendering with the original line by line, and convinced himself in this fashion that it was. A common friend informed me that, my "Gawayne" cropping up in conversation, Sir Henry had declared it *masterly*! Swinburne's friend, Watts-Dunton, exclaimed, "From a young man who can write as well as you, anything may be predicted!" He told me that he proposed reviewing me in the *Athenaeum*; that he had already read my poem carefully through four times; he shook my hand warmly in congratulation, invited me in to tea and—but despite the title of this present book, I fancy I have gone quite far enough! I am no Benvenuto Cellini to bewilder and astound a reader with the sublimity of his astounding arrogance! And my wife reminds me—how excellent it is to have a wife, it keeps one sane!—"the mortality amongst trumpeters is prodigious!" I may add that Watts-Dunton's review of "Gawayne" was never written. He was due away for a holiday, and I for one of my lecturing cruises in Belgium, for Sir Henry Lunn; and the next news that I had of poor Watts-Dunton, was of his death. Uneventful as his existence must have seemed to many, I am convinced that few men enjoyed life more, or got more out of it than he.

About this time, Henry Simpson introduced me to the Poets' Club, a society which, although it has perhaps a slightly comical aspect for some, numbered at this time many outstanding figures in contemporary letters. Maurice Hewlett was first Honorary President; Hilaire Belloc one of the Associates. I recall a brilliant debate between G. K. Chesterton and Bernard Shaw. Henry must have invited Mr. Shaw. He can hardly have smuggled himself in as a poet, on the strength of the creaking prose—however cutely camouflaged as blank verse—of "The Admirable Bashville".

The Club was cosmopolitan and its founder achieved something not negligible diplomatically, in bringing together in the bonds of good fellowship, men of so great a variety of nationalities. Kossor, the leading Serb poet and dramatist, was introduced to us by Father Nicolai, Serb diplomat: "Our little Kossor," said the Priest, "has two loves: women and the stars!"

Verhaeren was likewise a member, the poet *inter alia* of *Les Blés Mouvants*. Virile, colourful stuff, which has the stamp of that Flanders upon it where the saints were good trenchermen;

land of beer and blondes; of the Church and peasant *kermesses*! Marcel Wyseur, too, another Fleming, a superb reciter; and yet a third, a poet of sure and exquisite touch and subtle music who once, when I offered him a drink, replied surprisingly that "he would prefer a pig's trotter"!

Women as well as men were elected members. The beauty of the circle was Ella Strom—to-day Ella Grainger, wife of Percy Grainger, the Australian composer whose countrymen have erected at Sydney, the "Grainger Museum" in his honour. Ella was a portraitist, designer of tiles, and a poet. She was remarkable for her quantity of pale gold hair, milk-white skin, and sparkling eyes. Though she had composed verse of heavier calibre, her recitations at the "Poets" were confined to *trivia*, as suited the late hour and the bacchic assembly. "The Mice Lament", for instance. Humans are so damned mean; and the world is full of traps.

We have an appetite—may be
It's somewhat big for, such as we;
But that's no valid reason why
They should cut off our food supply!

But cold print is murder: one misses the gesture, the intonation, the *sparkle*!

Let me, lest my relation of the incidents, persons, and places which form the background to my translation of *Gawayne* become tedious, introduce a brief anecdote which has relation to my life in Bruges during the current spell of lecturing.

I was sitting in a café in the Grand' Place, which was nothing if not respectable, for the men one met there, though perhaps not aristocrats, were of the *élite* of the little town. A man I did not know by sight, an ugly thick-set fellow, sat opposite me, with a young woman on his right. The place was packed. Suddenly turning towards his companion, he hit her with his fist in the ribs, with all his might! She screamed, and I rose in protest. The gentleman on my left put his hand upon my arm unostentatiously, and pulled me down firmly into my seat again.

"He's got a gun!" he whispered in French.

I now noticed that the tough had indeed placed a nickel-plated revolver on the marble-topped table before him.

"It's disgusting," says my gentleman again—but without looking at the *apache*, and carrying off his comments as though he were casually remarking, "The cooking might be far worse than

it is here"—"he comes to a decent café on the Grand' Place, and behaves as though he were in *un tripot: une salle gargothe!*"

"Is he a Bruger?"

"Good Heavens, no! For what do you take us? He's come into the town to do some business—I'm sure I don't know what—and he's brought with him some friends who are about as low down as himself!"

The ruffian hit the girl in the ribs again viciously! It was detestable, but there, when one strolls into a café for dominoes and a bock, one does not of necessity desire to be shot! But when from hitting her in the ribs he fell to slogging her in the face, ejected he had to be.

We all took part in that ejection, and as it was obvious he couldn't shoot all of us, and that if he hit only a few, the remainder would lynch him, he left; and foolishly—but that was to be expected—his girl followed him. We all quitted the café in a body, and on the chance that we might prove of service to her, followed the couple across the great market square. When they came abreast of the statue of the patriots, Breidel and de Coninck, the tough shook his girl anew with astonishing violence, and again flourished his gun in menace, lest any of us should approach too near. Despite this, I rushed up to him, cautioned him that, although he might not realise it then half the town were watching him, and that it was only a matter of time for them to call him to account for his conduct.

The couple proceeded more peacefully after this. I could not make the fellow out. On close inspection, he had not the look of a "drunk", neither did he appear to be under the influence of a drug. Perhaps this was a specimen of his normal home life, which, to-night, he was carrying on in public for a change. A curious business! We followed him through the little Rue Breidel and into the Place du Bourg. Perhaps he fancied that he had dodged us for now, casting restraint to the winds, he seized the girl by the shoulders, and slammed her face forward against the stone wall of the Town Hall. Her nose was broken. Her blouse, white but now, and the top of her skirt were becoming saturated with blood!

I could stand it no longer. I raced up to him, dodged, got behind him, and sprang upon him, gripping him with my hands above his elbows, and planting my drawn-up knees in the small of his back. This was no easy posture to maintain, but I had the best of reasons for doing my utmost not to slip. He still grasped

his gun in his right hand, and was endeavouring to manœuvre round into a position which would enable him to shoot me. This, however, he could not do, for I held him too tight.

The girl stood watching us; the crowd, too, in a ring. My fellow writhed, swayed, jerked, and twisted his body in all directions in his endeavour to shake me off, but realising that if I were to allow him to do so that would be the finish of me, there I clung, heavy as a baulk of hay on a peasant's back. Suddenly he took three strides back, tripped over the kerb, and there we both lay full length on the cobbles. We were on our feet in a trice, and at that moment, two gendarmes, whose approach I had been too preoccupied to notice, flung themselves upon him, possessed themselves of his gun, kicked him vigorously and frog-marched him away! His girl followed him. Of this I was glad. I had half expected her to attack me, in defence of the ingratiating fellow who had just broken her nose.

Back at the café where the intruders had troubled the harmony of the evening—although, to be precise, it was three in the morning—lurid accounts of the disturbance began to circulate; but a Belgian representative of the firm for which I worked, observed, "I've heard that that swine's friends are only in the town for a few days. But they're more than likely to try to get even with you, for your being the cause of their pal's being locked up. We don't want to find you, one of these evenings, floating in one of the canals!" The representative obviously was addicted to melodrama.

"I don't fancy that form of navigation myself."

"Honestly, there is real danger! It's the fag-end of the season: hardly a dozen tourists left in the town."

"What do you suggest?"

"Write to Sir Henry, which you were speaking of doing the other day, say that you've been working hard—which is true—and think that you deserve a short holiday by the sea."

After all, why not? I let myself be persuaded, and sent my letter. By return of post, I received a cordial assent to my proposition, authorising me to go for a week to Blankenberghe at the firm's expense. I accepted, needless to say, this sporting offer, and putting up at the Hotel Godderis, enjoyed their capital cooking, and the superb breezes which, roaring over the North Sea, bring vigour and joy of life with every blast.

"Well?" I asked, on going back.

"They made enquiries, but I put it about that you were a Hun, and had returned to the Fatherland. . . ."

Back in London, I was to find that the younger generation—that is my own—were as quick as the older to see merit in my "Gawayne". Although only in the early twenties, Middleton Murry was already founder and editor of *Rhythm*, a review of admitted distinction which concerned itself with art and letters. He believed that Sidgwick, the publisher, possessed both scholarship and enthusiasm, and might possibly make me an offer. He wrote, "Kenneth Hare enjoyed a reputation at Oxford which this exquisite translation has fully justified". But as has been seen, it was A. H. Bullen, of the Shakespeare-Head Press, who had decided on publishing.

I had begun my translation on September 1st, 1910, when Professor G. S. Gordon—later a Major with three wound stripes from the '14-'18, Professor of Poetry, and President of Magdalen, declared what I showed him of it, to be "full of spirit and life"—The version which Bullen published, I completed in 1916. This was a second rendering, for when I had completed my first down to the slightest detail, I put it with some copy I had for Frank Harris, into an attaché case to take to the office. The case came open as I was boarding a 'bus in Victoria Street. I lost the MSS! The poem was *gone*! I possessed no second copy: no rough draft; not so much as a sheaf of scribbled pencil notes to guide me. All my labour was for nothing. The whole work was to begin again!

Well, I would begin it again. *Iustum et tenacem propositi virum*—I would be tenacious! I returned early that same night to my flat in Chelsea, and set to work anew. I had never concealed from myself my ambition to compose a poem which should rank with the foremost translations in the language; with those of Chapman, Fairfax, Gilbert Murray, or whom you will.

I have never regarded translation as work which should only occupy a poet when original inspiration flags. First one must employ one's deepest instincts in sensing every shade of thought and emotion of one's original by never ceasing adjustments of metre, which must be now rapid and full of assonances; then again slow and stately. Whatever be the passing mood of the author one is interpreting, that mood is first to be sensed, and then reproduced, not baldly, not merely adequately, but in the most appropriate possible terms of verbal music. Translation is an art on its own: a consummate art! An indefatigable scholar may,

with the best will in the world, produce a contemptible translation. A sublime poet may sit with an original poem before him and produce: an original poem.

The ideal translator must be both poet and scholar. His scholarship is necessary to ensure accuracy, but his soul must be kindled, his imagination aflame, lest the fruit of all his labour prove a dead thing. It was with such thoughts in mind, that I said to my friend Arnold Lunn in Bruges, "To translate from a living language into a dead one, is the Crucifixion; but from a dead into a living one is the Resurrection!" I think he appreciated my point, for I came upon the apophthegm not long after in his admirable novel, *Loose Ends*. . . .

Let me, with one of those changes which characterise rather the vagaries of casual conversation than the methodised language of books, break off abruptly while I recall it, to record a slight but curious incident, which befell about this time. I had brought down from Oxford the handsome labrador, Baskerville—"Baskers" for short—whom I have mentioned before as having once accompanied me when swimming. I was staying at this time with my parents at Twickenham, and the dog had taken a slight chill. This was nothing out of the ordinary, nor was there any reason to be apprehensive for his safety. Baskers was still young and tough.

I was crossing the Lock Bridge, on my way home from town, that being a short cut to our house as one emerged from the Old Deer Park. I heard somebody call to me—going, as I supposed, in the opposite direction—" 'Baskers' is dead!" I turned to see who called. Not a soul was in sight! I was alone on the bridge! There is no arguing about such things. They happen, or they don't. Those who have had similar experiences, will willingly credit me. Those who have not, will dub me a liar. What can it matter either way?

Although astonished, it never entered my head to doubt the truth of the information so curiously conveyed. I reached the house, and found Elizabeth—the old cook and loved retainer of our nursery days—on the alert for me at the garden gate. She was looking upset and shaken.

"Master Ken——" she faltered—she still called me "Master"—and there she stuck.

"It's all right, Elizabeth, I *know*. It was nobody's fault. 'Baskers' is dead."

"How *did* you know?" she asked, and she looked frightened.

"I—knew."—What could I say . . . ?

Whilst on a holiday cruise, I landed for a matter of a few hours at Corunna. Nothing suggested the imminence of the Spanish Civil War. Men sat on the terraces drinking. Young girls—graceful as Greek nymphs—with one here or there whose profile might become an antique cameo or gem, sauntered to the fruit market for their purchases. As they passed any group of young fellows, they would pause, as who should say, "You see us? Applaud!"—How the sometimes drab stuff of life receives new gilding from the beauty of women! Beauty: that is what they have to give us. The woman who has charm, is a triumph. She who has no charm, is a failure. This is the law of life. It is also a self-evident proposition. The young woman who can inspire a new Mona Lisa, a new Botticelli Venus, will outweigh, in her contribution to human culture, all the products of all the girl students of all the studios in the world. . . .

The sun shone in glory. A gypsy woman besought me to allow her *budgerigar* to tell my fortune. The bird lied, I'm afraid. It informed me, very positively, that even at that moment, a Spanish beauty had fallen in love with me. Her tastes would be exigent. She adored luxury. But let me whole-heartedly embrace my fortune! I should amass so considerable a sum by commerce, as would enable me, without grudging, to satisfy the slightest of her whims. Bird! that was a wild, but gallant effort. I should be a churl to grudge you a few pesetas. In a café near by, girls with snow-white petticoats and coal-black stockings, danced the cancan. In the market-place, there were as many ox-drawn carriages as there were taxis. Speed, that canker of our day, had not yet infected Corunna. From a sky that appeared cloudless, the storm-cloud burst.

In marked contrast with all this, was the atmosphere of Bruges, in the days which immediately preceded the outbreak of the Great War. I was there with my wife, lecturing for Sir Henry Lunn—in a pleasant room he had provided *ad hoc* upon the Dyver—on Flemish history, painting, and architecture. And to American audiences, on similar subjects. Before the formal declaration of war, men went hither and thither like ghosts. The silence of the market-place, was that of a church! Like invisible but well-nigh tangible things, unrest, apprehension, and dread made their presences felt. Rumours everywhere, and of every description. Men and women whispered together. No one seemed to talk aloud in those days.

Then came a stir with the arrival of Belgian infantry on the march, singing; for after the boredom of barracks, every change, thinks the soldier, will be for the better. Untidy fellows they seemed to the eyes of Englishmen not as yet accustomed to battle-dress; but they would say—"Never tidy, but always ready!"—"A demonstration only", one was told. "Manœuvres. They were only going to line the frontiers!" This deceived nobody. One knew that the foul creed of pan-Germanism would demand its quota in human suffering; that arts would perish, warm cities be destroyed; that crowds of these singing boys would be disembowelled!

Accommodation had to be found for these new arrivals. Hotels and boarding-houses were made ready in haste. They were billeted in monasteries, and even in the lower stories of the famous Belfry itself! From mediaeval loopholes strings would be lowered, with twenty-five centime pieces attached by the perforations. Waiters, on the alert, would dart forward, shoulder by shoulder with vociferous itinerant vendors, who dreamed of getting rich quick. *Sauté* potatoes—all hot, in paper bags—would be tied to the fishing lines; and *jambons*, and bottles of *bock*. Then one would hear the cry of "Hup!"—word borrowed from the English music-halls: cue for the execution of the master-equilibrist's most sensational turn. "Hup!"—and the music stops. The anglers had good luck with their fishing; but they fished with good bait.

The presence of the soldiers inspired confidence. For a breathing-while, the town regained cheerfulness; for an evening, a night, and a morning. But by this time, transport had been organised. All through the day, all through the night, the troop-trains screamed and rattled, and as the women watched their protectors depart, despair like a foul vampire-bat, settled down upon the city and sat brooding.

"Are you going to do your 'service'?" a woman called after me from a café.

"Yes!"

"Bring me a trunk-full of bleeding Prussian heads!"

Shops such as Tietz which had been under German management, were looted and wrecked. Tables, chairs, wardrobes, and chests of drawers, were flung from high windows into the streets. Banks were barricaded against the mob, and sentries were posted with bayonets fixed. Abruptly—why let financiers explain—with the single exception of the twenty-five centime

nickel piece—English, French, and Belgian money ceased to pass current. Men with such sums as a hundred francs in French or Belgian notes, or with the English ten or five pound notes in their wallets, or even with golden sovereigns, discovered that they were destitute. Plutocrats made the disagreeable discovery that they had not the price of a bock upon them.

The banks took all currencies still, but neither shops nor restaurants. We possessed a considerable sum in Belgian notes, and in English notes and gold, in Sir Henry's office upon the Dyver, and finding themselves unexpectedly embarrassed, *les clients de Lunn* came to us in troops to convert their cash for them into the coveted nickels. I carried all the money the office possessed, a very considerable sum, from the Dyver to the Bank in the Rue Flamande, clean across the town.

Here for an hour I waited queueing in a yard with a low glass roof without air-vents. The sun shone fiercely down, and as the temperature rose in this oven, the air grew fouler. A mob of loafers watched our entrances and our exits. At last my turn came, and after calculations which both sides checked with pencil and paper, I received the nickels in three sacking bags. God! but they were heavy! I felt as though they would drag my hands from my wrists; and the three bags were more awkward than either two or four would have been, as there was no balancing their weight. After a while, not my arms only, but my ribs ached!

First I would carry two in my right hand, and one in my left. Then I would reverse the process. There were no taxis, cars, omnibuses, nor trams—those peace-time luxuries! The men were "moving up"; and rolling-stock had been commandeered. I trudged on. By now every muscle, it seemed, was aching, whether in legs, arms, waist, or shoulders! In the place of veins and nerves, I felt that red-hot wires had been substituted. I was in super-excellent physical condition in those days, but mine was a feat for the Strong Man at a fair! Neither was mental worry absent.

Were a thief to snatch at one of my bags, in this scene of riotous disorder, how would I meet the situation? What would be my tactics? No use in thinking out a scheme when it was too late! "All three bags," I decided, "he would hardly attempt to take, for that would leave me with my arms free to deal with him." As I sweated along, I tried to work out a plan of defence. Were one bag to be snatched, the weight of the remaining two would effectually hamper my pursuit of the bandit. What if, with a

view to having my arms free, I were to lay the remaining two bags upon the ground? No! were I to do so even for the briefest moment, a confederate might catch up the two bags I had momentarily set down, and make off with both, whilst I was engaged in the furious attempt to retrieve one only.

I hit on no solution to my problem. I doubt if it admitted of one. I did, however, resolve to keep as much upon the alert as my growing physical exhaustion permitted; to retain one bag at all hazards and club my man with it. If he were to try any tricks, a canvas bag full of coins is a serviceable weapon; and I swore to myself that he should pay for any depredations with a broken skull.

Nothing of my plight could have escaped the notice of the band of hooligans who had hung about the Bank, booing and gibing. The nature of my luggage could present no mystery to anybody. As I coasted along the North side of the Grand' Place, heading for the *Rue Aux Laines*, confused noises reached me. I was told later that a shop was then being wrecked in the *Rue Aux Tonneliers*, just beyond the opposite angle of the square I was traversing. The mob was betraying its exquisite sense of humour by throwing iron bedsteads, from high windows, into a crowded street!

In such circumstances, the sight of a physically exhausted man staggering beneath the weight of money-bags which he is obviously incapable of carrying very much farther, may well prove provocative! I reached our office however without misadventure, and I have never ceased to marvel at my luck. Troop trains shrieked through Bruges, as it seemed almost interminably. The long day roared, murmured, bellowed, crashed and sobbed itself to its close. Yet however tragic the scene, starvation is to be avoided. When in doubt, dine!

Food and drink were becoming almost momentarily scarcer, but my wife and I knew our Bruges, and found what we were seeking at the *Sirène*. A sherry, hors d'œuvres, and sole. Steaks with fried potatoes, and kidney-beans—cut broad and prepared with genuine farmhouse butter—Gruyère. An excellent *Meursault*. And coffee-with-brandly to top up with. A café concert was in progress. Three funny men were finding work heavy. One of the trio with a false moustache, trousers which he had manifestly not bought in Savile Row, and a minute bowler hat attached to one side of his head with string, took the stage. His song was laughable and racy: it was punctuated by sobs! The men having been

all called up, the audience at this erstwhile masculine tavern was to-night almost exclusively feminine.

The comic sweated to be comic. He sang, he danced, he was grotesque. Intent upon earning their money honestly, his fellows likewise danced, and sang, and were grotesque. Unable to bear it longer, one woman went out, and two laying their heads upon their table-cloths, abandoned themselves to grief, and shook hysterically. The following morning, I came upon all three comedians upon the station platform. Their calling-up papers had reached them. Hats and moustaches were suppressed; but they all wore the trousers!

I was there to confer with the Station Master as to the best way to convey away my charges in safety, *les clients de Monsieur Lunn*. I had volunteered to evacuate two hundred, and each of my colleagues had made himself responsible for a certain number. My functionary observed that, "the military situation must take precedence of every other", which was reasonable, and he added that "the circumstances were abnormal", which I had perceived myself.

After this most satisfactory interview, curiosity led me back to the platform, to look at my three comedians. They recognised me and smiled. One took a banjo and sang. Soon a crowd gathered, the porters raising no objection; which they assuredly would have done, and for no reason, had this been England. I hope these admirable fellows escaped the lice, mice, rats and rain of the trenches. They would be better employed in some barn or quarry, fitted up theatre-fashion, in keeping up the spirits of their fellows. In every tragedy, how much is gained by comic relief! And yet the French still cut the humorous passages from the Shakespearian tragedies, and then complain that the gloom is unrelieved!

Rousing myself at three in the morning, next day, I had all my tourists up by four, poor devils! Then after a breakfast more meagre than most, I marched them all off, they carrying their own suit-cases, to the railway station, so as to be in a position to take advantage of every train that passed. I intended to pack my charges in, so often as opportunity offered, in small numbers, if accommodation were lacking for more than a few.

"We all meet at Ostend! You have only to wait at the *Gare Maritime*," I told them. Spinster nonconformists whose unalluring appearance might have converted Don Juan to celibacy, I packed in like sardines—there was no other way—between sweating

poilus who sang bawdy songs at them, peeled oranges over them, and made them ironical proposals of marriage!

Food was by this time unobtainable, hotel proprietors, chefs, caterers and waiters being called up for service with the forces. Buffets and restaurants were closed; their doors and windows planked up. My wife, I, and a girl pupil of hers whom she had been giving lessons in etching, having risen at three in the morning, did not reach Ostend until two in the afternoon. For seven exhausting hours, I had been packing human freight without so much as a bock or a biscuit. No ship had been sighted, and I found my charges sitting despondently upon their suit-cases.

They complained to me that the porters had refused to carry even the lightest parcel for under five francs, or twenty of the precious twenty-five centime pieces, the franc being still, officially at least, ten pence in English money. This at that time was a heavy tax on folk of exceedingly limited means. I remonstrated with the few porters who were still left against this exploitation, but found them disinclined for chivalry. They observed that "they would be crazy to take less, when it was sometimes possible to take even more!" An argument not easy to rebut.

Everything seeming tranquil for the nonce, I decided to set out with my wife and her pupil on a foraging expedition, for by this time we were savage with hunger. After much searching, we stumbled upon a squalid little café of a type frequented by fish-fags and longshoremen, the background to this harbour of refuge being a lavatory generously visible through a glass door, and sociably double-seated. There was no time to be nice. Neck or nothing! We decided to risk it.

Raw fish sun-dried was the speciality of the house, and that there should be no quarrelling over the bill, every fish had its price marked *on it*, with an indelible pencil. We ordered rolls, cheese if there were any, and coffees, declining the ravishing delicacy of the house on the plea—God forgive us!—of not being hungry. The place was so jammed with customers that every chair was taken, and above half the company were seated on the dirty floor. Two rough fellows, sterling folk with the air of fishermen, offered my wife and her pupil their chairs.

"Hartelijk wel bedankt! Ik dank u zeer!"

On my thanking them, they both shook hands with me, as though concluding a pact of eternal friendship. Then they took their seats on the ground.

From the company in this place, I gathered that many German spies had been taken in the last few hours, and all shot up out of hand. The favourite disguise was that of a sister of charity, which offered many advantages. As nuns, men would not speak with them, whilst the long folds of the habit concealed the peculiarities of the masculine gait. The hood too threw the face into shadow. Two young Huns of twenty or thereabouts, were seized in a tea-shop. Four were taken in the copse, a quarter of a kilometre from *Ostende Maritime* station. They had imagined themselves unperceived in the shadow of the trees, and ventured to light cigars. Aircraft was still such a novelty that it did not occur to them to look *up*! The radio operator of a Belgian reconnaissance 'plane made a report, and shortly after, all four were marched off and shot.

Had they represented a noble cause, these youths would have suffered as martyrs. But they were only the cunning vanguard by means of which spoliation and rape, and the butchery and torture of unarmed men, and of women and children, were to be loosed upon a home-loving and joyous people, engaged industriously in the arts of peace. The disguised informers died as anti-social vermin; as blacklegs against Europe and its civilisation.

What have the Huns ever created, which may counter-balance all that they have destroyed? Crazed with egotism, they demand *lebensraum* for their people, and then people for their *lebensraum*; and see in their national fertility—scientifically stimulated that it may vie with that of rats or rabbits—but one more weapon which they may employ against a peace-loving world.

My wife, her pupil and I emerged from our café, and returned to the quay. Banks were barricaded, as at Bruges, and sentries posted. Through the cobbled streets, refugee peasants were pushing hand-carts. These were piled high with tables, chairs, beds and bedding, chickens tied together by the legs, spades, pitchforks, and cooking materials. The man and his sunburnt wife thrust from the back. Dogs of different breeds—a draught-dog, perhaps, yoked with some pathetic little nondescript of the size of an English terrier; yet both proud to be fellow-labourers with the ally, man—pulled gallantly in front.

I witnessed the flight of the refugees from the Flanders of those days. I witnessed their return from exile four years later to the land which they, and their fathers before them, had tilled for centuries, and which the ravages of war had littered with scrap-iron, rendered leprous with mustard-gas, and pock-marked

with shell-craters in which a man might drown: prologue and epilogue of human misery.

As my wife, her pupil and I regained the quay, we found the wretched tourists whom I had hustled from their beds at four in the morning—without which precaution they would still have been at Bruges—seated as I had left them, upon their suitcases, in a state of settled misery. Several hundred more refugees had joined them, flocking in during my brief absence. It was rumoured that the last ship had left for England: that no other would put out now. Owing to the slump in money which had taken place overnight, my charges found themselves in the predicament of being almost penniless in a country with the language of which they were at best very imperfectly acquainted. Had the Belgian government mobilised shipping as they had rolling-stock, the sea could hardly have been more destitute of shipping; not a lighter, not a trawler, not a tug!

Yet nobody displayed the faintest symptoms of panic unless it were two men with something of the air of nonconformist parsons, who were running hither and thither shouting, "*Fishing-smacks!*" To which appeal not a soul was paying the faintest attention. As a representative of Sir Henry Lunn, a fellow who could "pull strings", as "in with" the financial magnates who control the tourist world, these wild-eyed gentlemen came rushing up to me, and one or two more, catching the infection, took up the cry, "*Fishing-smacks!*" .

"But I don't fish!"

"But you must get us away!"

"But where are these fishing-smacks, and who's going to pay for them?"

"The *State* must do that! The Belgian Government! The *State!*"

So they were invoking the "State"—strange God of the "brave new world", who demanding of his worshippers only the sacrifice of their souls for tribute, is to pay them all for existing: at their own expense!

At last, a miracle! The ship of which the most optimistic had long secretly despaired comes into sight!

CHAPTER VIII

THE FLAT-BOTTOMED BOATS

As the ship, which did not belong to the Age of Speed, drew nearer, we noticed that there was something deuced odd about her appearance, which nevertheless was not very easy to analyse. *Now* we saw clearly. She was one of those obsolete paddle-steamers which modern turbines have long since relegated to obscure backwaters. Never mind: she would float my expatriated poor devils away from Ostend!

"When I have seen you safe aboard," I said to my wife, "and all the people for whom I am personally responsible to the firm, I shall make for Brussels, and join the English-Brussels force, under Baron Jolly."

"No," said she firmly, "you have a duty to me too. Besides, it's up to you to see your people safe through to Dover, and then to see them on the train for Victoria."

"All the same——"

"There's no 'all the same'; if you wait, I shall wait too!"

"I daren't let you. Money alone would be a problem!"

"Then see your people safe through to Victoria Station. Then your responsibility to the firm will be over, and you can always join up in London. There'll be plenty of time! The war may go on for years!"

There was horse-sense in this, as there was in all Ruby's comments. "One thing at one time" is a rule that can't be bettered. A few marine porters whom the calling-up officials had overlooked or exempted, got two gangways ready: and ropes! With these they roped up the entrance to the right-hand gangway, leaving the left open. So soon as the mob which surged through the free opening became so compact and so combatant that it looked as though one half would squeeze or throw the other half into the sea, the porters reversed the process. They opened the right-hand gangway, and roped off the left. In this way, by creating a diversion, they prevented a dangerous concentration at one point. The plan worked well until both ropes were broken or cut. Then the mob took over, and the porters gave up.

Ruby and I waited on the quay until we had seen every one of my two hundred protégés aboard, for with admirable spirit and pluck Ruby preferred risking isolation in Belgium *sine die*, to leaving me at a pinch. But so soon as I had acquitted myself of my responsibility to the firm which employed me, we gave ourselves to the human billow, and it carried us aboard.

As our toy boat drew off, a young fellow, arriving at the quayside breathless from a sprint, flung his bag on to the casing of the near-in paddle-wheel, and himself after it: a prodigious leap! He landed on all fours like a cat, cleverly retrieved the bag, and unconventionally joined his fellow passengers! When not on holiday, was he perhaps an equilibrist on the "halls"?

We rode low in the water. A storm would have sent us to the bottom. By way of raising the spirits of the more timorous, a fellow in a broadly-checked overcoat, and with a booming and authoritative voice, was heard announcing to a crony, "I know it for a *fact* that this ship was only licensed to carry eleven hundred passengers. So far as I can calculate, we are *well over* two thousand on board!"

As against this, all luggage, with the solitary exception of our equilibrist's bag, had been left behind on the quay! All those suit-cases, to redeem which the by no means plutocratic clients of *Monsieur Lunn* had been bled by the porters, were behind us in Belgium, piled on the quay like rocks for the seagulls to perch on!—Though to the credit of the Belgian port authorities, or whatever other body was responsible, it must in justice be stated that the abandoned luggage did reach England three weeks later.

Well, we were off! That was the main thing, and the *Princess of Snails*, as I mentally christened our craft, was heading in the right direction, that of the chalky cliffs! We had no fault to find with our noble vessel, which threw great credit upon the shipwrights of good Queen Anne's day, except that there were no seats to sit on, no towels nor soap to the wash-basins, no paper in the "usual offices", not so much as a dog-biscuit in the dining-saloon, and no drinks at the bar!

But the *Princess of Snails* had her moment of immortality. As we neared Dover, she steered through the heart of a British fleet of war and dipped to the Admiral! We all cheered like devils, with the exception of those ladies who had fainted as a result of thirst, hunger, and exhaustion, and for whom no water was available to bring them to. But experienced travellers were at hand to administer a better brew from their flasks!

The conduct of the marine porters at Dover, made one proud to be English. They were intent upon assisting everybody to the utmost of their power. Unlike their cousins at Ostend, they displayed not the slightest desire to exploit unfortunates, but with chivalry which cannot be overpraised, forewent tips altogether in very many cases, as I myself can testify. One of them found my wife and her pupil corner seats.

"Don't trouble," I told him, "I have only Belgian money, which will be of no use to you."

"I'm not troubling about a *tip*, Sir!" he answered. I felt rebuked. What might these fellows *not* have made had they been sordid-minded, from famished and exhausted passengers whose sole remaining ambition was: home, food, bed! Instead, they behaved as *humani generis amici*, and, on behalf of my clients, even at this late hour, I acquit myself of a debt by thanking them. I take off my hat to the marine porters of Dover.

We were in England again, not a doubt of it! Opposite me in the carriage, sat a man whom I set down as an English colonel in mufti. He was reading with a look of stern distaste some publication of which I could not catch the title. "Inquisitor", thought I, "studying the statistics of adultery!" Curiosity beginning to hurt me, I made as though to reach for some non-existent object from the rack, and glanced over his shoulder. The publication was *Punch*.

Night had fallen. The station lamps were all alight. My wife, her pupil and I, had failed to discover any means of washing hands or faces since first we had roused ourselves for the fray at three in the morning. Ruby was still carrying the cage of love-birds which she had sworn she would not leave behind for the Cat, the Cooking-pot, or the Hun! A porter brought us *The Evening Standard*. I proffered him nickels.

"All I've got," said I, "but there are plenty of them. You'll be able to change them surely?"

"Don't trouble about *that*, Sir!" said he.

"But I can't take this paper for nothing! How shall we manage?"

He hesitated. Something was obviously on his mind.

"Sir—*do* your good lady's birds tell fortunes?"

I regretted! They were just ordinary birds: not psychic! With a look of comic resignation, our friend withdrew. What did he take us for? Were we as travel-stained as all that? Did we look like a pair of gypsies? Vagrants from fairs? I looked

at Ruby; Ruby looked at me. Then simultaneously we burst out laughing, and continued uncontrollably until we were quite limp.

Home once more in England, I lost not a moment in joining up. At first this was difficult. I applied here, I applied there, but the machinery for recruitment could not cope with the quantity of volunteers. The English nation had pledged itself to maintain the neutrality of Belgium. Nothing could alter that simple fact. Mawkish slogans about "gallant little Belgium" were for the gallery. Their crudity might disgust, but they could not deter right-thinking people. Did we not take up arms, we should be tearing up a contract to which we had affixed our seals with the eyes of the watching world upon us.

But if it was a moral duty to support Belgium—which none, surely, but the most brazen of sophists could pretend to doubt—it was likewise a measure dictated by the most elementary common-sense! Were we to suffer a rapidly-expanding nation of militarists, brazenly voicing Pan-German sentiments, to fortify territory within sight of us, and immediately fronting us, across the Channel? The dictates of national decency, and of national expediency coincided. Yet the path of honour shone as clear as the beam cast by the Eddystone light.

Owing to my previous training with the O.U.V.—Oxford University Volunteers: how this dates one!—I hoped for a commission. My friend, Lieutenant, later Major, Hugh B. C. Pollard, journalist, an authority on wine, food, and pistols, had had previous experience of active service, in which respect, he was unique amongst us. He advised me to apply for temporary military clerical work at Putney, where a motor-cyclist corps was in process of formation.

My old Oxford friend, Hugh Kingsmill, who combines in his genial make-up two elements rarely found in combination, humour *and* wit, author, critic, and to-day Literary Editor of *Punch*; and Douglas Jerrold, brilliant political and miscellaneous writer, historian of Gallipoli, and Editor of *The New English Review*, were my colleagues in this department. Hugh Pollard was already in khaki, a man of mark! His connection with the War Office gave him prestige in our eyes: a man Conversant with Generals; a Controller of Events!

Pollard would look in on us, take a hand with the clerical work and then, favouring us with a glance as of the Mona Lisa multiplied by ten, depart, riding to the public danger and the

War Office. Pregnant mystery surrounded him! Unchecked, he joined us. Unchecked, he left us; impelled by the sinister promptings of his inner spirit. Nobody appeared anxious, or indeed able, to keep this blonde Mephistopheles in control. Lieutenant Hugh B. C. Pollard would fling into the office, throw down his ash-stick, bully with unbelievable ferocity a couple of patriotic gentlemen who had come to place their Rolls Royces at the disposal of Government, and then, with a provocative glance of diabolical inscrutability, vanish once more upon the motor-cycle! Catesby had been pistolled! Rookwood was at the gallop! Guy Fawkes had been taken!

Over our extraordinary assembly those Fates which control even the Gods, had placed a highly paternal major; a skilful auditor, and a salutary check upon our financial intrepidity. He alone of our number had had previous experience of business. I remember his distributing amongst us those leaflets in which Lord Kitchener warned soldiers to avoid their perennial snares, wine and women. Self-consciously we glanced at the manifestos. Then in the tone of a polite schoolboy "drawing" a master, Hugh Kingsmill enquires "Sir, what would happen if, through oversight, one were to neglect Lord Kitchener's wise admonition?"

"You might find yourself in hospital when the country had need of you."

But the Major could not repress a smile. I suspected him of being something of a lady's man. Once there was a slight deficit in a balance-sheet. The money had been duly expended in the service of the Government, but the memo which contained the particulars of the expenditure, was not at the moment forthcoming. An insignificant deficit, but we did not feel like meeting it from our own resources. At such moments "cooking" is apt to begin.

"The blasted thing will turn up!"

"Yes. But they want the accounts *now*!"

"Can't you enter what we are out as articles of stationery? We get through lashes every week. Blotting-paper, foolscap, pens, ink, string, the Devil and all? Oh, Hell! You can fix it." I took their advice and when, with eyebrows cynically raised, the Major audited our accounts, he observed:

"I suspect Mr. Hare of keeping two mistresses out of Government funds, under the names of 'Tape', and 'Sealing-wax'!"

On 25th September, 1914, I received my commission as

Second Lieutenant in the 25th (County of London) Cyclist Battalion. Training began in earnest, and the sirens "Tape" and "Sealing-wax" were forgotten.

When the Cyclists were trained and really soldierly, for this was in 1914, and all were as enthusiastic as crusaders, we paraded in the grounds of the Bishop's Palace at Fulham, before Lord Plumer. Seeing me at the head of my platoon, in my unpretentious grade of Second Lieutenant, he asked my name. I told him and—to anticipate that I may not have to refer back later—he saw me in August, 1918, at the head of a platoon of the Durham Light Infantry, in Belgium.

"Don't tell me your name," he said, "I'll remember it," and he added, in a moment of time, "Kenneth Hare." Surely the much vaunted memory of Napoleon was not better than Lord Plumer's? For Plumer's command was for ever changing, as casualties created wastage which had to be supplemented by fresh drafts. Four years had elapsed since he spoke to me at Fulham; nor was there a soul at hand to prompt him.

Lord Plumer's appearance was exceedingly trim and cared for. No speck of dust was visible anywhere upon his uniform. His boots were spotless. His Sam Browne belt had a shimmer as of glass! In these ultra-democratic days, when quantity is so much more important than quality, one almost hesitates to say that a man is a "gentleman". Yet such Lord Plumer was, and if you ask me to define what I mean by that, I will do so. A gentleman is a man who can inspire confidence, but cannot betray it. (I am speaking, for the moment, of events in 1918.) We were men from many different units on parade.

"You are going up," said Lord Plumer, "to the fighting line. Should any of you have the mischance to be taken prisoners don't attempt to mislead the enemy, if you are asked to give information as to the disposition of British troops. Attempts to mislead the Germans are rarely successful. Their intelligence system is excellent. Of course you may possibly be tortured, but in this case, you will not put your miserable carcasses before your country!"—an invigorating thought.

We might have been Elizabethans fighting in the Netherlands of the Inquisition or—damn it!—soldiers of Coeur-de-Lion at grips with sadistic Saladin! There were still sentimentalists amongst us who clung to the belief that the Hun was *au fond* an excellent creature, with a weakness for beer and his pipe; and very fond of little children! That superstition at least, is gone.

A boy from the next village to this in which I now write, was shot in cold blood, for refusing to give away the dispositions of the troops opposite him.

At a later date, when in hospital at Montana, I asked a friend, Colonel Shaw Page, whether any authentic instances of the torture by Germans of English prisoners of war, had been brought to his notice. "No," he said, pursing up his lips with a deprecatory air, "no. Nothing mediaeval or interesting. Just suburban plain-cooking stuff. Boiling eggs under the arm-pits and so on."

Lord Plumer's speech concluded with his good wishes, and the casual observation that we should soon be under fire. No sooner had he pronounced the last word, than three men fell headlong! A moment's silence: then universal laughter. The casualties came so pat upon his words as to suggest clowning. But this was not so. Spanish 'flu had just claimed three more victims! I have anticipated. I now resume the thread of these reminiscences.

We are now in 1914. Our Headquarters is at Fulham, in a drill hall with various rooms attached, just off the main street, to the east side of Putney Bridge. Our Colonel was an old South African War veteran, but I don't think he made sufficient allowance for the fact that we had most of us come from sedentary occupations. We trained, drilled, and route-marched unceasingly. So soon as we had consumed our heavy mid-day meal of roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, fruit tart and cheese, we were in the saddle and pedalling our push-cycles up that never-ending Putney Hill, until our rendezvous at the Windmill was reached. This was the focal point of all our manoeuvres. Since one was not allowed to dismount for so much as a second, the uphill grind was enough to stop the action of the heart.

Our Major was a plethoric and middle-aged man, whose fat face underwent all those remarkable changes of colour which characterise the dying dolphins of romance. Street urchins used to watch out for him, and scream excitedly, "Stick it, Fatty!" Were I a painter, and commissioned to paint a picture of Hell, the Windmill of Wimbledon Common would figure prominently in the foreground.

So soon as we had received a modicum of training, we were employed on coast defence, which was by no means a sinecure. A trifle beyond the district which we patrolled, two spies were run in whilst attaching explosives to the railway lines. Then the temptation to "get rich quick" was proving too strong for certain

poor men, and we had to be on the alert for smugglers. A boat would put out from the English coast containing cans of petrol. These would be attached to a submerged buoy and sunk in the sea; a difficult mark to pick up. Then as opportunity served, the cans would be taken aboard by German submarines.

We also patrolled railway lines. To do this requires a cool head and steady nerves. It was the winter season. Great gales would roar along the coast, the deafening blasts rendering a train's swift approach inaudible. Or fog would roll over us from sea or land. One craned one's neck, and strained one's eyes peering between swathes of mist. One dared not let one's attention wander for an instant.

On Christmas Eve, 1914, we received the order to stand-to. The wind blew terrifically. I watched a tin caught by a gust, and whirled along the pebbly surface of the beach like a paper bag! We were informed that the enemy had put out from the German coast with a flotilla of flat-bottomed boats. They carried searchlights and machine-guns. I asked the Colonel what they thought to achieve by this projected raid, since they would find it impossible to get away, and must either surrender, or be slaughtered to a man.

"They might reasonably hope," he told me, "to create some slight panic in London. Then there would be a popular outcry against our sending more troops to France. This might be expected to last so long as there were any German forces, however few, remaining in England. That's probably their motive in organising this expedition." Cyclists being intended for light mobile troops, our orders were not to stand except where the ground offered excellent cover, but to harass the enemy by sniping and blocking roads. We were to drive off cattle and otherwise prevent him from supplementing his supplies, and to withdraw in good order on Tunbridge Wells. Whilst deriding the Huns, the Cockneys affected to regard the cows as a highly dangerous species of big game.

"Drive off the cows', eh? And if thim bastards turn nasty and *round* on you, you daren't bayonet them: it'd be making a present of meat to Jerry!"

I ventured to ask the Colonel: "How did we get to hear that the German flat-bottomed fleet has put to sea?"

"Some English intelligence officer with a wireless set, has risked his life to get the information through to us; just as Lodi did for them."

At four in the morning, the order reached us to dismiss. Despite thick fog out to sea, units of the British fleet had succeeded in locating the raiders and scattering them. It is worth while mentioning this incident as some people have imagined that the whole business of the flat-bottomed German fleet was as much a myth as that of the Russians travelling through England, "with snow on their boots"!

Our battalion was stationed in a number of pickets, at selected points along the coast line, touch being kept between them by day and night patrols. My billet was one of a row of workmen's cottages, as yet half-finished, particularly about the roof. The fireplaces were small, and the problem of how to roast the Christmas turkey which some patriot of the vicinity had sent us, was eagerly agitated. Our company cook, a very bright spark indeed, hit upon an ingenious solution.

He conveyed the bird to Pevensey village, which lies a mile or so back from the coast line, on the carrier of his motor-bike, roasted it there in the baker's oven, covered the creature's entire surface with numberless pieces of tinfoil from cigarette packets, of which he had made a collection *ad hoc*, and charged back with it to us. By this device he kept the heat in; when we peeled it, it smoked. But we were puzzled, at first, when a silver ingot was brought to the board, in shape uncommonly suggestive of a *turkey*!

Unluckily, whilst carving it, the cook's knife slipped, and he sliced the tip of his thumb clean off! I replaced the fragment that it might grow again, and bound it in position with strips of a clean handkerchief, so that it shouldn't slip. Weakened by loss of blood, perhaps a little also from shock, my man collapsed upon the floor, but I brought him to with a trifle of brandy from my flask. As my Lieutenant—we had no Captain for "O.C." at our local company headquarters—was absent, I telephoned the doctor.

He examined the wound, assured me that I had done exactly the right thing, chaffed me for "leaving nothing for him to do", and took his departure. Later, when the lieutenant in question made his periodic health report to Battalion Headquarters, omitting all mention of the severed thumb, he referred to the cook's disability as "alcoholic poisoning": my table-spoonful of brandy! Which throws a revealing sidelight upon the mentality of a bigot.

To the drilling, and route-marching by day, there began now to be constant night exercises, "night-ops". In addition to all

this, I would have to sally forth at all hours night after night, warning beach-combers that they were not to gather bait by lantern-light. There was no sleeping off by night, the exhaustion incurred by day. Graduated physical training was not as yet practised, and there was neither science nor system in the conditioning of ex-civilian soldiers for service in those days.

A stolid fellow from Lancashire—born, if I remember right, in Burnley, and with interests in pig-iron—expressed the method of cavalry training with his unit, in the following apophthegm: "The sooner he breaks his bloody neck, the sooner he will learn to ride!" Given cycles for horses, our scheme was similar. I thought myself tough, tougher indeed than the average, but so early as the New Year of 1915, I was relegated temporarily to the "Territorial Force Reserve", with an enlarged heart. I was cautioned to keep myself in readiness, and expect a speedy recall to the colours.

In the interim, something had to be done to earn money. Ruby and I had moved into the upper half of a house in Redcliffe Road, but on the very day after our taking over, I had to leave London for Maidstone, where I had secured a minor post on audit, for the Local Government Board. I was not recalled to the colours until 30th November, 1917. In June of that year Sir Martin—later Lord—Conway, appointed me Curator of Photographs, in the Imperial War Museum, then in the making. My offices were in the upper half of a picturesque house in Queen Anne's Gate.

There was nothing stereotyped about the work. All still had to be planned and contrived. When I took up my curatorship there was no single photograph in the "photographic section". When I was recalled to the colours there were many thousands. Every air raid over London brought grist to my mill. I enjoyed the services of a most efficient camera-man, whom I thought of as the "Nark". Zeppelins overnight, heralded the "Nark's" appearance in the morning. He had the right camera-man's temperament. Bloody tragedy or roaring farce alike existed to be photographed. His eyes sparkled with enthusiasm; he radiated *bonhomie*! He was lean, pushful, insinuating.

"Sir!" he would announce, beaming like a Pickwick undernourished, "I've got *something* for you to-day! A bomb hit Little James Street last night, and I've taken a *lamb* of a photo for you! Look! A *duck*! Half the wall down, the girl dead, and a bed hanging from the top window by one castor!"

As against this genial ghoul, my secretary, Miss Smith, and three girl clerks introduced a domestic note. It was needed! I had a medical section, which contained a photographic record of patients suffering from gas-wounds; ghastly documents which I top-shelved, but which were of unquestionable value to medical science.

I was also successful in securing from Pathé their film of the Battle of Jutland; a document of historical importance. I was not present, however, to superintend the unpacking, as before it arrived I was again in khaki. I was offered by the Home Office the post of Official Reporter, with permit to photograph what and where I liked. I refused, however, as I wanted to serve as a soldier, and in no other capacity.

I was sent to a medical board. The doctor informed me that I was still suffering from a dilated heart; result of the strain imposed upon it by that ill-considered over-training of 1914.

"I shall mark you 'B.I.'"

"Does that mean I shall not go to the front?"

"Not, at any rate, to the fighting line."

I suppose I looked disappointed.

"Do you *want* to go?"

"I *shall* go," I answered, "if I have to swim the Channel!"

He laughed. "If that's how you feel about it, I suppose I shall have to mark you 'G.S.' " (General Service.)

Mr. Foulkes, of the War Museum and Tower of London, gave me a farewell lunch at his club, and very generously complimented me upon the work of my department.

"I will see that your office-stool is kept dusted," said he, "and bring you back with a 'rise'!"

I mention this minor success in a subaltern capacity, because popular superstition represents poets as incapable in business. All history gives the lie to this nonsense. Matthew Arnold was an inspector of schools. Milton was what we should term to-day "Minister for Foreign Affairs", to Cromwell's Government. Shakespeare became part proprietor of the "Globe" Theatre; whilst as for Chaucer, he showed himself equally at home in war, business and diplomacy. Poet though he was, and world-poet, in his capacity of Controller of Customs, he frustrated a plot for smuggling English wool out of the country, and was rewarded by the Government of that day with a bonus out of the sale of the confiscated fleeces! Had these poets been incompetent in practical affairs, none would have the right to reproach them,

for they would still have left the world in their debt. But they were not.

I reported for duty on the East Coast, having been seconded to the 30th Battalion, London Regiment. When I arrived at headquarters, not a soul appeared in sight. But for the sentry, on guard before the door with bayonet fixed, the house might have been to let.

"Where's everyone?" I enquired. One should not, of course, converse with sentries on duty, but rules are made to be broken at discretion, and I wanted to know.

"They're all at the smoking concert," said he, indicating a largish hut in the vicinity. So, throwing down my kit, I entered, and as the curtain had that moment fallen, reported present to the Colonel, who was occupying a seat in the centre front row.

"Good! Take a chair!" said this genial commander, and motioned me to the one on his left, which happened to be the only empty seat in the room. This was Mars in expansive mood! Up went the curtain again, to reveal Bobbie Comber, who sang, with admirable expression, a patriotic song concerning Joan of Arc. There were two girls in the cast, an exceptionally pretty blonde, and a brunette. The latter, though by no means ill-favoured, was of a grosser type, much given to grimacing and rolling her eyes. In a village, her mugging might do well enough, but it began to get on my nerves.

"How do you like our brunette?" the Colonel was enquiring. "A new arrival?"

"*Our*" brunette! "Good God!" thought I, "the Old Man's got a crush upon her!"

One must be tactful. One should also endeavour to create a favourable first impression. So, sinking my voice, so as to strike the right sympathetic note, I answered:

"I think, Sir, she's immensely seductive!"

"Huh!" cried he, emitting military noises indicative of disapproval, "we got her in for the Tommies!"

Oh, Diplomacy! Is it thus you treat your votaries?

Except that we were infantry as opposed to cyclists, the work was in many respects that to which I had been accustomed at Pevensey. There was the same routine of guards, pickets, and patrols. Rain fell incessantly, and the countryside would have looked very depressing but for the welcome relief afforded by a bevy of land-girls. They wore open shirts, musical-comedy velveteen breeches, and bright red sashes. Under the rose, they

could also be met with at off-hours, and were sociably inclined.

An old country fellow, of seventy or so, told me that he had half-a-dozen under his personal supervision, to instruct in farming, and generally "keep an eye on".

"You must find them rather a handful?" said I.

He paused a moment to reflect before replying:

"They are good girls, they sing, and have rare voices." Thus did this patriarch make answer, in sterling Elizabethan English, not unworthy of Shakespeare's Prospero! I remember once at the "To-morrow Club", the topic being the naturalness of blank verse, and how easily prose ran into it, I quoted the old fellow's startling reply in the course of an after-dinner speech. Harold Munro came up to me afterwards, produced pencil and paper, and demanded: "What did the old man say? Say it again!"

"Look here," I answered, "I don't know that I want you to write it down. I have an idea that I should like to make use of it myself somewhere."

"Oh, well," he answered, "I think I remember it."

He repeated it correctly.

"Yes, that was it," he commented, wrote the line down, and returned to his seat. . . .

Before I was sent abroad, Lord Conway invited me down to Conway-Allington, his castle in Kent, where Lady Conway proved herself an ideal hostess. Lord Conway was Director of the Imperial War Museum—hence the invitation—but he was a great deal more than this. An athlete and a scholar, his record as a mountaineer and explorer was little short of astonishing, whilst his subjects included besides politics—he was a member of the "Coalition Government"—architecture, the history of the Middle Ages, of the Renaissance, and of Flemish Art, a subject on which he wrote a standard book. I always admire a scope of interests, and detest being driven, intellectually speaking, into a corner. It was with sincerity that I once remarked to him, "So far as a modern may, you can say with Bacon, 'All knowledge have I taken for my province!'"


As I arrived at the station, an air raid was in progress. The chauffeur drove fast with lights masked. We drew up before a stone doorway, surmounted by a coloured alto-relief of St. Martin giving the half of his cloak to a beggar. So soon as the Hun 'planes had left the kind Kentish sky, I was shown the rose garden. The façade of the house which gives upon this part of the grounds, is witchcraft in stone.

We dined in the prodigious kitchen, converted without vandalism, to the requirements of a modern dining-hall. The primitive walls rose noble in stone. There was the Homeric fireplace, with a chimney-seat to either side, where men could sit and roast, and laugh old Winter's spite to scorn!

The Hun was back again. Swish-swish-swish, one heard the shrapnel, pattering down amongst the roses outside. The raiders had been chased ignominiously from London, and were again overhead. After roast ducklings and a historic Moselle, our party climbed to the roof, to survey the country from the battlements. The moat lay loosely about the castle. Before ever the Romans landed, that water had surrounded a British village, and the mediaeval castle-builders had adapted it into their scheme of defence, without contracting its span. .

The night air is filled with silver haze. Mist lies in swathes of tinsel, or cloaks with dewy gauze, the dripping trees. On the moonlit moat, two swans lie sleeping, their listless necks at rest upon their backs, their beaks tucked into their wing-feathers. Away there below us, part seen and part divined, lies Chatham, beyond the battlements to the right. The anti-aircraft gunners redouble their efforts. The raiders are dropping turpenite. Of a sudden, an angry glow bursts into being. Tall trees, till now invisible, show stark against it: fantastic in outline: black! And now flickering flames, wickedly leaping, dye the milky mist as with drops of blood. Houses are ablaze there; whole streets!

A curious feeling takes possession of me. I have lived all this before. I have endured a siege and in this castle. I give no trust to this mood, but viewing the conflagration through the iridescent mist, beneath that blue and moonlit sky, nothing gives the lie to this cheat of fancy. Far into the night, with the stubborn intensity of charcoal, the churlish glare continues; whilst, enchanted upon the water, the swans lie tranquil in dreamless sleep.



CHAPTER IX

MOVING UP

FROM the 30th, I was transferred to the 32nd London Regiment. We were all stirred up with a long spoon, and so soon as one had made friends in one clan, one was bidding them good-bye. This was inevitable, as the contingents in France looked to the reserve battalions to make-good wastage, and drafts were always going off. It had, however, its comic side. The men of the County Regiments would be lectured on the traditions of those regiments to which they had been appointed. They would swell like turkey-cocks in their legitimate pride at being numbered amongst such august bodies of men! *Then* they would be transferred! I chanced to overhear the following brief dialogue which would seem apropos.

Suffolk Private: "You're a 'Suffolk' man now, young feller, and don't you forget it! You've got our badge up!"

London Ditto: "Call me 'Suffolk' agine, and I'll knock your effing block off!"

My new unit, the 32nd, were stationed at Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex, where I reported a few days before Christmas, 1917. The battalion supplied a guard for Horsey Island, which was joined to the mainland by a narrow causeway, a mere track, often covered by the sea, even at low tide. Its borders were roughly indicated by stakes driven into the ground, but of these by far the greater number were missing. One step too far, whether to right or left of this narrow path, and one might, so it was asserted locally, find oneself floundering in deep water and drown.

One set out to Horsey Island from the mainland at low tide, but if the wind blew from certain quarters, the path was submerged, and the stakes alone showed above the water, when there would be nothing for it but to wade. It fell to me to take a haversackful of plum puddings to the Guard, for their Christmas dinner. As I was new to this part of the country, a young officer was despatched with me to the mainland end of the causeway, to show me the route. It was four in the morning, and dark. One could discern nothing beyond three or four yards ahead. Flash-lamps we had, but made no use of them.

On "night-ops", they are apt to alarm apprehensive sentries, who are liable to shoot first, and challenge afterwards!

I could see my new friend's face, and he mine, and that was about all we could see! Suddenly, uncouth, unaccountable, a hideous screeching rent the air. All that I had ever heard or read about Witches'-Sabbaths, or the wailing of banshees in ghost-ridden castles, rushed pell-mell into my mind! There was *no delusion* about the eerie racket, for it was *still going on!* Shadows of Glamis! What was it? We were shoulder to shoulder in the obscurity. My friend looked the question, and I looked as blankly back. Unconfined by his forage-cap, the hair on the left side of his head visibly stiffened! Having stared skywards, I now looked downwards. I had the heel of my hob-nailed right boot upon the wing of an owl! I leaped back! And he flew off!

I found the causeway completely submerged. So far as one could judge by appearances, all that lay before me was open sea. But this was the hour for which low tide had been announced. Headquarters was in touch with meteorologists and kept records. I had neither field nor gum boots, just ordinary army issue, and puttees. But I had a flask of whisky in my pocket—the Army's panacea for every ill!—and I decided to drink this if I found myself succumbing to the cold of the North Sea at sunrise, upon a morning which had set in with snow. The sky was lighter, but the stakes which I began now dimly to see to the number of some two or three ahead of me, appeared far too sparsely planted to prove a fool-proof guide. Nothing appeared likelier than that I should inadvertently tread, at one point or another, beyond the limit of the raised causeway: and then?

I stumped forward. The water never sank below my knee, and the wind kept rolling waves which soaked me to the skin. I had no map, but I judged the island to be in the neighbourhood of a mile out from shore.

Long before I had reached half-way across, I had lost all sensation below the knees. For all the feeling they afforded, they might have been amputated. I drank the whisky, and floundered on. I emerged safely at last, however, and threw down my load of Christmas puddings. Official low tide was now over, and there was nothing for it but to wait for the flow, and the ebb which was to follow. When the time for the return journey was at hand, there was still no visible path; only the scarce stakes, with a sea-gull perched upon one of them, like a vulture prescient of a traveller's decease!

I floundered down the bank and into the water. As I did so, I heard one of the men say, "I bet you anything you like that the sea has one of our officers before Christmas is over! Are you taking me on?"

"No," his pal answered him, "I've always said it would!"

A month or so after this, I had a few days' leave, and spent it at Twickenham. I found a guest at home, one Albert Eichelbrenner, a Parisian despite his name, staying with my parents. He was a boy of fourteen who, on the score of his youth, had been rejected by the Air Force of his country. Albert had conceived the spirited idea of coming to England to learn aviation, of obtaining his pilot's certificate over here, and with this in his pocket for credentials, of returning to France. He assumed, and his assumption proved correct, that thus provided, he would encounter no further obstacles.

In a letter in which he thanked my father for his hospitality, Albert's father entreated mine to regard himself as *in loco parentis*, in view of the lad's extreme youth and inexperience.

My father was an early riser by temperament. The "five hours for a man, six for a woman, and seven for a fool" of the Duke of Wellington, would not have struck him as over rigorous. As a boy I was habitually under slept, and to be called at seven for breakfast at a *quarter to eight*, was the rule, even although, when in the twenties, I had gone to an occasional all-night dance. I would put in a word for Albert's exemption from this draconian discipline, but in vain!

"But, Father, think what sort of a day he's having! A strain mentally and emotionally no less than physically!"

My pleas were fruitless. As my father returned from the bathroom, there would be an ear-shattering knock at Albert's door.

"I am *in loco parentis*. He *must* be down to breakfast!"

To temper this rigour, I entered Albert's room on one such occasion and enquired, "*As tu bien dormi?*"

To which, yawning cavernously, the youth replied, "*Comme on dort quand on dort seul!*"

I took him to see Hampton Court. The picture galleries were closed owing to the war, while as for the buildings themselves, they were cloaked in the thickest river mist I had ever seen in my life. Albert assured me that nothing but just such a mist could have invested the old palace with that air of mystery and awful grandeur which it then wore. He hoped that no intrusive

ray of sunshine would break the spell. There you may glimpse his sympathetic nature, and his very real vein of humour. I bade farewell to my family and to Albert, and rejoined my unit. Albert obtained his pilot's certificate in England, and as he had foreseen, his 'plane in France. He was killed in his first action. Such was the brief history of this gallant and enterprising boy!

From the East Coast, I now reported at Aldershot, and by a new Protean change, was seconded, this time, to a battalion of the Durham Light Infantry. As the Captain had not yet reported, to my inexpressible delight, I found myself virtual Acting-Captain to the platoon. But the post was no sinecure. It was rendered onerous by repeated visitations of that foul malady, "Spanish 'flu". The M.O. worked night and day, as I did myself. We were short of many things, of blankets for example, and I would knock up the Quarter-master as many as three times in a night, to obtain from him issues of mackintosh sheets, as substitutes for bedding. It was a new experience to find men so absolutely dependent upon me. One fellow went so far as to put out his tongue, and asked me to prescribe. I recommended a "Number 9."

Once I was ordered to march a company which had no connection with my own, on a short route-march. They were invalids to a man, and had reached us from different parts of the Empire. My instructions were not to overtire them, but to have a hawk's eye for malingerers. "Allow no 'swinging the lead', eh? You understand?" We had marched a bare fifty yards when a man fell out: a malingerer I made sure!

"Well!"—sharply—"What's wrong with *you*?"

"This, Sir."

In a trice he had his left boot off, whipped out a Swedish knife, slipped it into its heft, and cut a thin slice from the sole of his foot. Never have I felt a sharper stab of nausea.

"Well?"

"He's got leprosy!" a dozen voices volunteered.

One morning, I was up before sunrise, to march off my platoon for practice at the butts. No arrangements had been made for breakfast; nor for lunch when our destination had been reached. The last great push had begun in France, and with thousands upon thousands of men being expedited across the Channel, it was not to be wondered at if our home arrangements were often at "sixes and sevens". We had been up at four this morning,

and we were not back before three in the afternoon. "Food for the love of Mike: Food!"

Instead of lunch, a parade was called, and we all took our places to hear a General harangue us. As I stood up before my platoon—a full Lieutenant now—I suddenly went blind! What was it? "Spanish 'flu", a touch of the sun? Of the old heart trouble? I have no notion. My eyes just ceased to function. Surreptitiously I raised a hand to look. My hand was invisible! I might have been standing in a cellar on a midwinter's night. Of one thing I was determined. I was on parade. I would *not* fall out!

"Pick up that officer: he's going to fall!"

"No, I'm not, Sir!"

"What's wrong with you, Lad?"

"Nothing, Sir!"

"Are you ill?"

"*Perfectly* well, Sir! Only I can't see you."

"Carry him away!"

But I would not be carried! I had not fallen out on parade. My would-be helpers compromised by grabbing each an arm, and I was hauled off, legs trailing. And now I recognised the voice of the M.O.

"You're in your tent now: you can let yourself go." I collapsed unconscious. No bed or bedding of course. I was on bare ground. That night, I came to. I knew it was night, for I saw a candle. Then my sight was restored? Yes! I could see again! Thank God for that! Something was moving near me—or was I delirious? Something lurching, floundering. What the Hell! Whatever it was, it had tripped over my legs. And the candle was out! Then fumbling, and for a while futile, attempts at relighting. And then light again: a thin flame which was describing in the darkness, curious curves.

Oh! to see again! The joy of recovered sight!

"Hullo!" cries an officer whom I had not seen before, "have you come to? I've got"—hiccough!—"cerebro-spinal meningitis. I'm also drunk. As you're ill too, they've put me to be in with you!"

What arrangement could be more reasonable?

Within three days, although lamentably weak, I was again on duty. The half-belief that were I to prove myself efficient, from doing a Captain's work, I might be confirmed in that rank, urged me to redouble my efforts. And our Captain's prolonged

absence strengthened this hope. I was still O.C. of my small command when we left Aldershot for Folkestone. We were billeted in a small hotel, the management of which had left the beds for our use; or perhaps these had been commandeered.

"Spanish 'flu" had to some extent been got under by the hard work of the doctors, but sporadic outbreaks still necessitated my troubling the Quarter-master's nocturnal visions. It was this singular man's practice to *smoke* himself to sleep. I would find him snoring in his shirt-sleeves, his muddy boots showing beneath the pale blue eiderdown's fringe of lace, and the stub of his execrable cigar burned out to within a few millimetres of his walrus moustache. *Why* the flame always halted just there, and never advanced that fraction farther which would have set the object on fire, what subtle sympathy held it back, offered a theme for fantastic speculation! I came to the conclusion that constant application of some species of pomade must have rendered the hirsute ornament non-inflammable. Here at Folkestone, I had a bitter disappointment. A few moments before we embarked, the Captain turned up, and took over what by this time I definitely regarded as *my* command. His coming put an end to a brief but exceedingly enjoyable period of my life.

We crossed the Channel with three or four destroyers as escort, the deck being divided into sections, over each of which an officer was put in charge, to preserve order in the event of our being torpedoed. The sea was rough, and many of the men were sea-sick. Those who were well, took a pleasure in demanding of those who were only endeavouring to persuade themselves that they were well, "Whether they didn't fancy a nice dish of fat cold pork?" A witticism which acted as a strong emetic! A French philosopher observes; "*L'homme est l'animal méchant par excellence*", a view for which there is much to be said.

Drawing into Boulogne, we lay for some while alongside a transport carrying Chinese labourers into France for road-mending. Clad in blue trousers and loose blue tunics, their wives accompanied them. The Chinese stared at us, smiling as always. Our fellows stared stolidly back. One of my poor devils who, a few moments back, had been vomiting in agony—every fresh paroxysm being aggravated by offers of cold pork—recovered as though by miracle when he surveyed the scene. A critical study enabled him to arrive at this conclusion—

"I'd sooner have a girl out of Boolong," said he, "than I would out of them!"

It will take more than flood, fire, or earthquake to eradicate man from this globe.

This night we spent on the hill behind the town. Air raiders appeared and bombed us. We could afford to laugh at them, for our shelters were excellent. But the soup was cold when we returned to table. Why will visitors always call during meals? In the small hours of the morning following, our long trek up to Ypres began. We "foot-slogged" almost the whole length of the journey, for we were infantry and this was our job. Only one lap, and that a short one, we travelled by train. Not in *wagons de luxe*, but coal-trucks. I had coal dust in my eyebrows, eyelashes, eyes and hair! I think in the very texture of my skin. Should I ever feel clean again?

One had to exercise ingenuity to obtain baths in the villages where we were billeted. These, in the accepted sense, were non-existent, but my batman routed out tubs and barrels from odd corners, and made use of these so often as there were pumps in the vicinity. In one barn, fragrant with the scent of newly cut faggots for the winter's firing, my faithful Cox discovered an enormous half barrel which he filled to the brim for me, by means of a wooden bucket.

Whilst bathing, a cow approached, as I supposed, to drink. *Hornless* creatures are preferable as bath-companions, but I had no stick with which to drive her away. I now perceived an aged peasant woman following, who with no more ado than a *Bonjour, Monsieur l'officier*, sat upon the edge of my bath, and fell to milking and to conversation.

I wished to send a present to my little daughter, and the opportunity presented itself at St. Omer, where I found two dolls in a toyshop. One of the pair was of poor quality, but such as an English child might like for its quaintness, its costume being that of a Breton fisherwoman. The other was a luxurious affair, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed, but so manifestly English, that I feared the child would have seen too many like it, and despise it in consequence.

The shop-keeper exhausted all his arts of persuasion in trying to get me to take this English doll which I fancied less. "Was it the price?" He would reduce this by one, two, three: five francs! "No? What then?" As a last appeal, he turned the doll upside-down, and in the tones of a connoisseur protested, "*Elle a de bien belle lingerie tout de même!*" An appeal which one may designate the *argumentum ad militem*.

Though exhausting, life on the march is rarely dull. One takes refuge from weariness in studying the map. There is a variety of duties. Sometimes it would fall to me to apportion the men their billets. This meant that, after an all day's march, I must see every man in the company housed, before looking out a sleeping place for myself, or dining.

For some while I was Mess President. Until I took over in this capacity, our food had been only fit for hyaenas. Huge steaks served with mountains of potatoes, are understandably popular with men whose peace-time occupation is with pick and shovel. But when I learned that "doomps", or dumplings, were considered alike by officers and men as pleasing accompaniments to *every* dish, and that a "coople o' doomps", with gravy and brown sugar, was regarded by certain of them as princely fare, I found myself wondering whether they would not fall to cannibalism also, now that they were exempt from the restraints imposed upon them by the British police.

Burgundy, claret, hock were unknown to them. Whisky, uncanonical whisky, was all their drinking. Not all perhaps. Rum, cognac, benedictine, or brown stout, any of these stimulants successively or concurrently was welcome to them, provided they induced, with a minimum of delay, that blissful state in which thoughts wander away into stupefaction, and oblivion crowns all.

"What were you, my lad, before you joined the army?"

"A cook, Sir."

"Good. You shall be Company carpenter."

"What were you?"

"I was a carpenter, Sir."

"Good. You shall be Company cook."

I set light by this traditional system, and daring iconoclast as I was, I chose a *cook* to cook! I discovered that we possessed in the company a young fellow who, when I interviewed him, confessed to me that it was his ambition to become one day Chef of the Savoy! I gave him a trial, and found him admirable. The peasants in Belgium and Northern France are early risers, but they never gained a lap from me. I would be there with the foremost, bent upon securing the pick of the market.

Owing to but too well founded suspicions alike of their enemies and allies, these practical fellows had improvised cellars in wood-stacks, and bottles lay choicest where faggots were thickest. I smoked their tricks however as surely as the water-diviner

discovers the hidden springs. But how superior were my rewards to his! When all was running smoothly, we invited the Brigadier to dinner.

By way of providing a background for this festive affair, I purchased a rose-tree—yes, a whole one!—full of blossom; and this for the modest sum of five francs. For when I demanded of an old cottage woman if she would care to sell it me, she replied, “But assuredly, *Monsieur l’officier*, one cannot *eat roses*!” After long and anxious thrashing out of all the details beforehand, my genius prepared a six-course dinner! The Brigadier arrived at the hour appointed, and appeared not a little astonished at the flowers. But for these, the apartment would have appeared squalid. As it was, our Guest of Honour sat like Milton’s Raphael in Adam’s bower! Long afterwards, I was assured, he still spoke of the admirable dinner he had enjoyed in our Mess.

But all this was breaking the Durhams’ hearts, and the expiration of my term of office brought relief to all. The cook returned to button-polishing, and the Mess to “dooms”. But these intervals were of short duration. With the exception, as I have said, of a brief spell riding in coal trucks, we marched from Boulogne to Ypres. When I felt fatigue gaining upon me, I derived consolation from a Latin tag which, picked up I have no notion where, remained helpfully in the subconscious.

. . . *Serpens, sitis, ardor, arenae*
Dulcia virtuti: gaudet patientia duris!

Stubborn hearts rejoice to worst
 Desert heat, snakes, sand, and thirst!

The men also had a gag—caught perhaps from some smoking-concert—which one would hear the brighter spirits declaim sometimes in the Villain of Melodrama’s sinister tones, as long mile followed long mile of never-ending poplars and cobbles.

Whitehall don’t even know we’re born, which fills us with despair;
 But on we goes, the Lord knows why, and we’ll get to Lord knows where!—

What excruciating pathos!

I was now once again seconded, this time to a unit I shall call the Royal East and Wests—. . .

We had marched many hours. The men had been allotted billets, and exploring the village, we Company Officers came, this

calm evening, upon a clear expanse of water. It was not until much later that we perceived a notice.

DRINKING WATER ONLY. OUT OF BOUNDS TO TROOPS.

We were caked with dust and sweat. A swim was indicated. We stripped, and then waited upon the bank, as nobody appeared anxious to take the first plunge.

"After you!" I called to our Company Captain.

"Go ahead!" cried he.

Why did he delay? What had he in mind that he was so anxious for me to go in first. I suspected a trick. But I was not prepared to wait indefinitely shivering upon the brink, so scouting around until I found a spot where the water looked deep, I took a header. Then warily, my gentleman followed suit, and the others after him. Then we made an attempt to dry ourselves upon the sopping pocket handkerchiefs with which, for long hours past, we had been mopping our brows upon the line of march. A return was then made to billets.

I turned to one of the Second Lieutenants. "Why the Hell," I asked, "was Blank so windy about diving first? There was nothing *wrong* with the pond, was there? Why did he want *me* to go in before *him*?"

"A chap the other day," said my informant, "dived into one of these ponds, and the Salvage or some set of merchants, had been bunging it full of barbed wire. Lashes: wagon-loads of it! All the rusty bits which were no longer any blasted use for anything. They'd used the pond for a sort of dump. This chap dived right head first into it, and bloody well ripped the flesh from his bones!"

He left us soon to go on a course, and for a long while we saw no more of him. His temporary successor was an Englishman who had lived most of his life in Canada. He was the best of good fellows, and an amazing horseman. About this time, I suddenly developed peritonitis, a complaint which had attacked me once, years before the war, when on a holiday in Paris. The M.O., a young fellow in his early twenties, observed, "This may kill you, you know. You ought by rights to be in a base hospital. But that I could never get the 'Old Man' to sanction. He has only two tests for illness: 'Has he a temperature?' and 'Is he vomiting?' Now you aren't vomiting, and your temperature

isn't what one would call high. Luckily we aren't on the move to-morrow, so you can lie up a bit. I'll send you some opium pills. Drink, but don't eat."

Shortly after this interview, my batman, a sterling fellow, appeared carrying upon a plate, a steak which might—so huge was it—have been carved from a bison's bottom! He was a marvellous forager. I wondered how on earth he had obtained the brobdignagian delicacy. He had deposited it in a rook's nest of greens and potatoes.

"Eat this, Sir," he urged in coaxing accents, "it *must* do you good!"

I hated to hurt the feelings of a first-rate fellow by a refusal, but to have complied would have been suicide! I spent the night in agony.

"Well?" enquired the 'M.O.', "did the two opium pills do the trick?"

"They produced no effect at all!"

"I'll give you more then to-night: *if* I've got 'em! We've another day's easy from the road. Lie up while you've got the chance."

That night my batman arrived with *one* opium pill; presumably supplies were running short. My new Captain looked in, and showed himself exceedingly sympathetic.

"We're on the road again to-morrow," he said, "but you look far too ill to walk. I'll make arrangements for you to be taken on a limber."

Before sunrise we fell in; I feeling as though I had swallowed broken glass, and wholly unable to straighten myself up. The limber not appearing, my new Captain insisted upon my riding his horse at the rear, whilst he took his place at the head of the Company on foot. He was an expert horseman, and more accustomed to riding than to marching. He was also a much older man than I, both of which circumstances combined to make this a chivalrous gesture. We had made but a single kilometre when I heard one of the men grousing, "Poor privates have to march. Officers ride!"

Did he speak to be overheard? Was he talking *at* me? To grouse is the Englishman's privilege, and there are grouzers in every community. Perhaps I was foolish to give the matter another thought, but the words nettled me, as I had always determined to show the men that there was no manner of thing which they could endure which I could not. I dismounted and

sent the horse forward to the Captain. He came back to see me.

"I feel better."

"You don't look it; however, as you like."

We marched seventeen kilometres—no great distance, but far enough for a sufferer from acute peritonitis. We carried our regulation sixty pounds weight, which was made up by such things as spare boots, ground-sheets, water-bottle, revolver, cartridges, and iron rations. On reaching the Flemish farm where we officers were to billet, I went in, whilst the others occupied themselves about one thing and another. I went into the kitchen, which was empty, staggered, fell, and lost consciousness.

When I came to, I realised that the coolness of the floor-tiles was giving some relief to my aching head. I was now running a dangerously high temperature, and felt as though I had a dagger razor-sharp in my intestines. So soon as I could raise myself up, I crawled off to my bed, hauled myself somehow on to it, and lay writhing. My batman brought me a tumbler of black coffee: a *café filtre*. What a man! Cox had obtained this provision by shouting merely. Languages were made for slaves. If the Dagoes failed to understand, he shouted louder! Clamour bears all down, and is its own interpreter

The drink did me good. In every disease, one is in process of getting better or worse; if worse, one blames Nature; if better, one thanks the Doctor. Hour by hour now, I mended. I recovered, I suppose, because it was intended that I should; "A God took him by the hand." . . . We were in the neighbourhood of Cassel, that abrupt mound which overlooks so many miles of the surrounding flats. The Captain who had tried to procure me the limber, and had lent me his horse, was still with us, and proved a godsend. Although his life had been one of action, I discovered that he could talk art, and was sensitive to the appeal of pictures. Yet he was a materialist, and would heretically maintain that, if they desired to rouse the emotions, poets should turn *distillers*: and he would compare the effect of Hamlet's, "To be or not to be" disadvantageously, with that induced in *him* by three-quarters of a tumbler of rum!

One night when we were "bivvying", about twelve o'clock when I was on the point of turning in, a motor cyclist arrived with a note for my Company Commander, Pinchbeck, who had returned to us again. It informed him that my platoon

had been chosen to represent the Battalion, in a Brigade competition the following morning. The other platoons taking part in this exercise were selected from, I forget which, battalions of the London Rifle Brigade, and the "Loyal North Lancs" respectively.

The note of instructions gave the map-reference of the point for assembling, and I was to set out with my party at six in the morning. There was no time to lose. I got my boots on again, and studied instructions. Lest there might be any error in my reading of my map, I decided to go over the whole ground there and then, and begin at least with one advantage: a previous acquaintance with the route. I took map and flash-lamp, and set out.

I had gone but half a mile when it became manifest that I was being followed. But *why*? And by *whom*? In that treacherous glimmer under the stars, it was impossible to determine. What conceivable interest could he have in tracking *me*? Was he some intelligence officer whom my map, and the obvious zeal with which I studied it, had rendered suspicious? It seemed unlikely: *but* there he was again, peering at me round the stem of a tree!

I halted and motioned him to come up with me. He withdrew promptly into the shadows! I applied myself to my map anew, walked on a dozen yards, and then: looked round suddenly. There he was again! Several times I signed to him to draw level. He would not comply! I began to wonder whether, carried away by the conviction that I was up to no good, he might not shoot me in the back; whilst *his* refusal to come up and give an account of himself, suggested that he was no less apprehensive that *I* might deal summarily with *him*!

Suddenly, coming towards me, I recognised an officer of my own battalion, a sterling fellow if ever there was one, hurrying back to camp. He hailed me with, "Hare! what are *you* doing, exploring Belgium at this hour?" Without enquiring as to the name of the lady who had presumably turned him into a night-walker, I explained the situation. Whilst we were talking, the fellow who had been spying upon me, emerged for a moment into the open to look at us, and decamped. My friend and I gave chase, but he took himself off too quickly for us to continue long. No doubt he had satisfied his curiosity, and decided in his own mind that I was friend not foe.

The young officer who had joined me was one of the most companionable men in the world, and out of sheer good nature,

he accompanied me for the remainder of the journey. Together we noted all the landmarks and checked them against the corresponding indications on my map. We returned to camp together. His company had converted a harassing and tedious night into an exceedingly agreeable one. He was killed not long afterwards at Mouscron, but not before he had loosed seven and a half drums of Lewis-gun ammunition at the retreating Huns, scorning cover lest he should lose time in seeking it, and shooting from the shoulder.

I will not enter into details of the "test", which after all was but a practice for real war, beyond saying that the competing platoons were subjected to various forms of surprise attack. These included shrapnel, gas, and bursts of machine-gun fire from supposed ambushes, and snipers' nests. Against these assaults, the corresponding counter-measures had to be promptly decided upon and adopted. The march to the point where this exercise was to take place, had been exhausting, both as regards the roughness of the country—most of it was through wood and scrub—and the actual distance travelled. Our manoeuvres concluded with a frontal attack against a fortified position upon a ridge, when the superb rifle work of the platoon was abundantly in evidence.

After the summing-up by the umpires, my platoon was awarded thirty-two points, as against the three points and two respectively, which were adjudged to the platoons specially selected to represent the rival battalions. This was my "minute of immortality", as after the speech in which he discussed and criticised the events of the day, the Brigadier called for me, warmly congratulated me, and shook hands with me before the whole *pâra*de.

I marched my men back, and it was singing all the way! The *prîapic* activities of William, a long-shore adventurer, were recounted in song; neither was Mademoiselle of Armentières forgotten: a nymphomaniac of local repute.

One day, as though from nowhere, a Staff Captain with whom I had been slightly acquainted in civil life, turned up at our mess, and requested a few hours' leave for me.

"I want," he said, "to borrow Kenneth Hare."

"What do you want him for?"

"To make him drunk!"

"It'll cost you a damned lot of money!" . . .

As I passed through the market-square of Cassel in my "Staff

Wallah's" car, an English military band were playing "Patience". I have always detested the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. I cannot forgive Gilbert his smug satire of men so much his superiors both in wit and artistry as Whistler and Wilde. Though never gross, Gilbert is always vulgar. The "commonplace type", getting fatter on his 'bottled beer and chops', was Gilbert's God Apollo! That is the secret of his success. I hate the bombastic dialogue, the machine-made verse, the sexless music. At dusk, the band packed up and marched away.

In the car, we followed the winding road which climbs to the top of the hill. Night fell. Stars shone dimly. There was no moon. Below me I saw heavy guns in action, and by their flashes, could determine with exactitude, the lay-out of the line. It was as though I were studying some ancient sketch-map of the time of Marlborough. The abrupt change from the peace-time square, with the band playing in the gentle evening light, to the panorama before me, the darkness over which was only relieved by those flashes, appeared an anachronism. Life has these contrasts.

I remember a reporter's once telling me, as he came from the court where a murderer had just received the death sentence, "I shuddered when the Judge put on his black cap: shuddered with horror! The surroundings were so modern: clerks with their fountain pens, you know, and all that. The *man* was so *modern*: his trousers all neatly creased, and his Burlington Arcade tie. And they were taking him out to *hang* him! Now if he'd been in a blue coat and knee-breeches, I shouldn't have given a damn. I'd have found it all quite natural!"

It was this sharp contrast between modernity and the primitive which fascinated me at Cassel. In a matter of minutes, I had quitted the mental world which Gilbert evokes, with its self-complacency, its prudery, and its datedness: for one that was dateless! for one primordial as that of "King Lear": those mud-flats: those flashes: Death himself on his White Horse!

CHAPTER X

YPRES

A LIEUTENANT'S work upon the line of march, in these days when the infantry were not mechanised, required a toughness as of phosphor bronze! The Captain, ahead of the Company, rides. His second Lieutenant marches behind him, but the full Lieutenant, marching at the rear, has the job of remonstrating with those who fall out, when if he decides that the faller-out is not a malingerer but genuinely succumbing to fatigue, he issues him a chit. This, duly signed and dated, sanctions the man's temporary absence from his unit, as otherwise the military police might run him in for a deserter.

My battalion was graded "B.2". Many had sustained wounds, and their stamina was not that of perfectly fit men. It would fall to me to reason with a man in a state of collapse and having reassured myself as to his genuineness, write, sign, and date his authority for falling-out. Good! but what of the Company all this while? They have not ceased to march steadily on, and when my little formality is accomplished, I must sprint to regain them, when—as often as not—another poor devil falls out, and everything is to do again! And this not in the morning freshness when one is full of vigour, but towards the close of an all day's march, when the toughest are feeling hacked to death. But with the others, it was *only* march, with me it was *march—halt—sprint*, indefinitely! *Serpens, sitis, ardor, arenae—!*" (Halt and sprint again!) *dulcia virtuti—*(And I'd better carry his rifle, he obviously can't carry it himself!) *gaudet patientia duris!*

Once at the end of a march towards nightfall, I saw my last half-dozen men go down all together, when within sight of the barn where they were to billet. This was no case of feigned exhaustion, of "swinging the lead". They fell like baulks of timber. We had trekked thirty-two kilometres that day, and the men carried the regulation sixty pounds in weight; I sometimes more, for in addition to my own stuff, I carried two rifles, which I had taken to lighten the loads of a couple of men in a state of semi-collapse.

The Captain and his second Lieutenant had left us, going on ahead to see about billets. Having shown our last casualty the destination for which we were making, I now made for it myself, and prepared to hold a "foot parade". The infantryman of this day was a marching machine, and the ex-ploughmen's feet—Ladies! will you ever forgive me!—required as much attention as a pair of your own white hands! Blisters had to be looked to, and all other defects reported immediately to the Medical Officer. I rarely carried less weight than my men, for I made a practice of taking his rifle, if I found that, by so doing, I could dissuade a man from falling out.

I wonder if the reader will regard my saying that I arrived *alone*, on this occasion, at the billet, when all the men of the Company failed to reach it without resting, as a romantic lie? He will be the more likely to credit it if I allow myself to anticipate for a moment, and inform him that, in the years immediately following the war, dilated heart proved a perpetual curse to me. I had syncope in crowds! Syncope in 'buses! Syncope in tubes: but the doctors cut me off travelling by these, last *sine die*! Twice I collapsed in the Strand, having accidentally got myself mixed up in the crowd of spectators watching a Lord Mayor's Show.

Three times I fell headlong in the streets of Bruges, when making for the lodgings of a friend, who had invited me to make one of a party to view the famous procession of the "Holy Blood". When ordered away into the country, in England, and staying at Cookham, I would go up into my bedroom which was but one floor up. When she entered with the morning tea, the servant would sometimes find me on the floor where I had spent the night! The draught she created by leaving the door as well as the window open, sufficed to revive me. A doctor assured me, before I began to mend, that my heart had become dilated to twice the normal size. Obviously in these days, a very slight shock indeed would have been sufficient to kill me.

I resume my narrative at the point where my desire to exculpate myself from any suspicion of exaggeration, led me to break it off. By dint of steady marching, we drew daily nearer to the Ypres salient. As the battalion passed through Poperinghe, we came under heavy shellfire, when I saw a man from one of the many contingents which were making use of the road, do an uncommonly odd thing. He took all the money from his pockets, and threw it into a bush! He then removed belt and tunic, and

pitched them after the coins. Was he a shell-shock case? Or had the Medical Board which passed him as fit, overlooked the fact that he was mad? We are all liable to mistakes at times! He would no doubt have stripped himself naked, had not an officer rushed to the spot, and seizing him by the hair with his left hand, and thrusting a revolver into his mouth with the right, persuaded him to resume his attire and his place in the ranks.

The "East-and-Wests" took over at a place called "Compass Point", where the men "bivvied", and the company's officers entered into possession of a dug-out which was neither fragrant nor commodious. It was five-foot high from muddy floor to muddy ceiling, and the stoop which these contracted quarters gave us, it became difficult to correct when we got outside. We were six in all, Pinchbeck, O.C. Co., my Bacchic philosopher who found rum more provocative of high emotion than *Hamlet*, myself, and three second lieutenants, one of the latter temporarily attached to us.

The bed portion of our bed-sitting-room consisted of plank bunks with rabbit wire stretched across to do duty for mattresses. We had no bedding, of course. These bunks were set three on either side, and were so close the one above the other, that when I forgot and raised my face more than a few inches, I rasped it upon the muddy plank above. All the space which these narrow bunks left over, consisted of a gangway two-foot wide, which served also for sitting accommodation. For chairs we used petrol cans, which were excellent as there was no room for anything bigger.

Sprawling upon my bunk, I read *La Vita Di Cellini*, piecing out, by recollections of the French version which I had read earlier, my deficiencies of vocabulary. What imagination, what vitality, what joy in living that swashbuckler of genius possessed! How he must have exulted in that prose style of his, assertive, exuberant, crystalline in clarity! Benvenuto Cellini, Goldsmith of Florence, you helped me to forget the stink of that dug-out, the lice which overran us, and the scabies which was rapidly transforming the entire surface of my skin to the colour of red flannel!

My fellows played poker, and Pinchbeck enjoyed the strains of "Destiny", on the gramophone. Not once, did he put on any other record but that one waltz! If there were other records, he did not trouble to unpack them. When the fatal machine needed winding, if it were within reach, he wound it himself. If it were not to hand, he would bid whoever sat nearest it, to

"wind ut oop!" This was a speech for him. Having no ideas, he had naturally no need for words in which to convey them. Liquor only deepened his taciturnity. "Destiny!"—"Wind ut oop!"—"Destiny—wind——" I thought I should become habituated to it at last, as the Devils are said to do to brimstone, but I never really did.

Once the infernal machine broke down, and I savoured the recovered calm, as a wine-lover might the bouquet of a noble vintage! I could have inscribed the word, "Gratitude" upon a tablet, and hung it upon the wall of a church! But it was not in the nature of things that this respite should be of long duration. A cable was despatched. A committee of busy ladies concerned with despatching discomforts to the troops "jumped to it". And a larger and louder gramophone arrived!

The two entrances to our dug-out, to right and to left, were so narrow that one could only enter by lying flat, and pushing one's pack before one. These entrances were closed by double folds of black velvet curtains, the edges of which were thrust well into the clay of the walls by means of transverse splines of wood. The object of the double folds was to leave a small triangle of space between them, in which one might shake oneself awhile, if chlorine or some other gas had infected one's clothes. It goes without saying that curtains designed to exclude gas, exclude air also.

One morning, on attempting to get out, I found one of the men sleeping in the right hand entrance, into which his body fitted as a cork fits into a bottle! Except for these entrances, there were no air-vents. In this sealed-off mud-hole—the walls of which could be both reached in comfort by the finger-tips of a man of medium size, to right and left; and the roof by a dwarf's head—candles burned the night through, packet after packet of cigarettes was smoked, and the exhalations of dirty humanity—for baths belonged to another world—were as pest to the nostrils.

There was a belief, or superstition, that the lower bunks were the healthier. I had the top left. It required moral courage, I do not say to *rise* from one's bed of a morning—there was no room for that—but to *roll* over the bunk's edge on to the muddy floor! For one woke half asphyxiated! Only after several efforts, could I concentrate all my faculties upon that final *heave* which got one up.

"To die,—to sleep,—
No more;"

How easy! Why, one had but to go on lying where one was! Oblivion was at hand like an obsequious lackey. The end of the war: and the end of the world!

But I was not going to let myself be tricked like that. "Live! Live!" my daemon kept urging me. "You have poems to write; a life to resume upon the imaginative plane!" And my brain would tell my body to rise, and, after many efforts, I would succeed in rolling to the floor, and crawling forth for an airing in a gas-contaminated world.

Once at three in the morning, a shell which tore a huge crater a few yards from us, rocked our dug-out. A plank broke in the roof, and a load of muddy earth covered my face. Though none of us ever hinted at the possibility, I fancy the thought that we might be buried alive, was at the back of every brain. I mentally decided that were it to become manifest that we were buried, and were a manly effort to fight my way out to prove ineffectual, I would strive no longer lest I should become mad.

I proposed to myself that lying in such a degree of painlessness as might be possible, I would fashion in my mind's eye a picture more glorious than any painter had painted, of the Assumption of Our Lady. I suppose my thought must have received a tinge from the catholicism of that Bruges to which I owed so many busy, yet often care-free hours. I was a poet. I would become a painter, if only in dream. So I would depict her robes; so the clouds of morning shining effulgent behind her; thus, and not otherwise, would I set the new moon beneath her naked feet.

At other times, the comedy of life would reassert itself: such contrasts lie at the core of things. I would wash my socks in the petrol can which I had put out overnight, to catch the never-ceasing rain. My laundry done, I would dry by candle-flame, or if the process appeared too tedious, wear the things wet. Food was plentiful and unexceptional except when, on some occasion, a Hun sniper gunned the breakfast-bearers at unexpectedly close quarters. They threw themselves and the rations into a gravel pit, and the ham, when it came to table, proved stony as the path of virtue.

"Man is an adaptable animal!" How trite: how true. Choking with the foul air of our dungeon, I would sometimes take a turn in the open, if shelling were slight, and return if it increased in intensity. As I trudged back through the pyrotechnics to the comparative security of our dug-out—to the candle-ends with their eyes of light, and Benvenuto, and the *Vie Parisienne* girls

who formed our picture gallery—a comfortable thought would take possession of me. I had lost neither arm nor leg. I had retained my eyesight. Shell-fire had not disembowelled me. I was neither dying nor dead. How delightful to be going home!

How did it get about that I knew something of Flemish? I suppose from my occasional back area assistance to amorous subs.

“Hare, how do I tell this girl that she’s an angel?”

“*Engelje?*” (And a broad smile from the village rose).

“Gawd! You’re putting it across! Tell her, will you—she doesn’t look the squeamish sort—that I know I’d like her bubs, and think she has a Hell of a fine mouth?”

“What says the Officer?”—(“*Wat zegt den officier?*”)

“But aren’t you too young to know? You’re not? Well, *gij hebt mut mignonne en dikke taten.*”—(“Fat bubs and a lovely mouth.”) “I made it ‘fat bubs’, George; I hope that’s O.K.? It’s a compliment in this part of the country.”

(Renewed smiles betray the fact that the Rose is not made of wood, and that my unvarnished *patois* is producing an effect.)

“Gad! You *have* put it across! You’re the goods, Hare! I needn’t bother you any more. I’ve got a hunch she knows what I want.”

“She’s got a notion about that, no doubt. She’s obviously a fearfully intelligent and observant girl, and that look in your eye, George, would give her a *clue*.”

I received an order to report to a battalion of the Carabiniers Belges, at St. Jean, or some point near by. I haven’t, of course, my old military maps by me to-day, to enable me to verify the precise location. I was appointed front line Liaison Officer, and four runners were assigned to me. But I stuck out for having my old batman, Cox, as one of them. He had proved himself so good a fellow, with his hot coffee at all hours, and his bison steaks for peritonitis, that I could no longer contemplate the idea of campaigning without him.

He had joined up by giving his age as ten years younger than in fact it was. In his civil capacity, he was foreman of a gang of pipe-solderers, and would have become a sergeant-major, I cannot doubt, but for one circumstance which, in a changing world, militated against him: he could neither read nor write. Neither could he—though I know this sounds incredible!—tell the time by a watch. He would calculate the hour by glancing

towards the sun, and mentally measuring the angle, precisely as Mine Host of the "Tabard" does, in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Yet what he lacked in education he abundantly made good by horse-sense, and took the lead as a matter of course when amongst his fellows. I never found him a penny the worse for his ignorance, say, of the art of map-reading. In the waste country about us, where all landmarks were obliterated, he never faltered. Naturally; he had learned to rely upon himself, and not on signposts.

"Send me, Sir," he would almost plead, if there were a despatch for delivery, "you know I can find my way like a hound!"

In due course I received my complement of men, and we marched until they could go no farther without a rest. I called a halt by what looked like a single-roomed cottage of Gothic design. The place was obviously locked up and deserted, so I suggested their sitting with their backs to it, so as to get some slight shelter from the eaves; for it was raining heavily, of course: did it ever do anything else in wartime Flanders? I then went ahead alone, to consult with an officer I knew, whom I believed to be employed on transport lines, somewhere near the Salient.

"You'll find him along this row of 'orses, Sir, standing by a coal-black 'orse, nime of Snowball!"

I found my friend, who gave me particulars as to the general lie of the land. I returned, and my four men rose, and saluted.

"You gave us a foony place to lean against, Sir," says Cox, in his North Country accent, "d'you know what it is?"

"Isn't it a cottage?"

"Look through here, Sir, th' window's broken."

"A mortuary!"

What a symbol of the place towards which we were going, and what an omen had I been superstitious! I found my point at the Ypres end of the Ypres—Commines Canal, where I was to establish my first pair of runners. They were to remain here so many days with the Belgian reserve line, and alternate with my front line pair, turn and turn about. I left them with the Belgian privates, who appeared intent upon making them feel at home, and having reported to Commandant Kettenmayer, the officer-in-charge of this part of the line, set forward yet again with Cox, and the other fellow, whose devouring homesickness was such as to make him blockish and melancholy.

Before the war, he had never left his village, and found himself

baffled in a bewildering world. His parents must have been of like stamp with their son, products of the perennial in-breeding in villages.

"When my father sees, 'Paid in the Field', in my Pay Book, he thinks that I'm never in a billet. He thinks the whole war is taking place in a field!"

What a boy to send me for responsible work! More than ever did I thank Jupiter for Cox. On, on and on we tramped, through rain which fell with the violence of a sudden shower which one thinks will pass over, from one minute to another. It had been raining, however, in precisely this fashion, all that day and all the previous night.

I consulted my compass. It is said that the "compass cannot lie": that is a lie. When its owner's tripping and falling on it has cracked the glass; when grit clogs the needle-socket, and rust gets down to do a "job of work", the compass can lie like a Hun propagandist. How to orient my map? This too was a question. The sun was down: if indeed the rain had not extinguished it! There was not the faintest glow to warrant one's taking one quarter of the heavens rather than another for the west. No star shone. And then, a map comes in for so much wear and tear in wartime, that despite the celluloid case, damp had reduced to pulp the section it was imperative that I should study.

I must surely be at the point where I am to report? Yet how to be certain? I survey for the hundredth time, the desert about me: the rain-sodden primitive waste; the piles of broken brick which once were houses; the mounds of scrap-iron, petrol cans, barbed wire, and rusty rifles, which are now the property of the dead, or are the dead destitute of all resources? Their bodies lie higgledy-piggledy, the most prominent feature being the boots, which are large and ugly, and refuse to dissolve into their elements.

Here, there, and everywhere, lie wartime graveyards. They are dug without method and in a minimum of time, by men who dread a rising moon worse than damnation, for they fear to draw the enemy's fire. Fifteen graves here; twenty there; and here again, seventeen, each with its trumpery cross of rough-sawn deal. Every square yard of this desolation resembles every other square yard, and every square yard of the million, we owe, Germany, to you; not to your rulers alone as ignorant and lying men assert, but to your diseased pan-Germanism, and to every soul of you all who gives countenance to your system.

"Stay here, Cox. I'll go on and explore."

I do so, and after tramping, in solitary fashion, for a quarter of a mile or so, come to the conclusion that I must have gone too far. I return therefore: to be hailed upon the sudden by humorous shouts from the *Catabiners*, who are on the look-out for me.

"He's coming from Germany!"

"To tell us he's taken the Kaiser prisoner!"

"Boys, *la guerre est finie!* Here comes the Crown Prince to ask for an armistice!"

And so forth. There was not an iota of malice in this chaff. I had wandered across No Man's Land—perhaps farther!—without realising it; and yet I was coming back alive! I was reporting *as from* the German positions. They realised my mistake, and the humour of the situation gripped them. I had incurred great danger unquestionably. Said Cox, who was superstitious, "I'd rather have the post of your batman than any other job in the British Army! Whilst I'm that, Sir, I *know* I shan't be hit. You bring me luck, Sir. *You* won't be hit. You weren't born for it. It's fated!"

I discovered the billet assigned for Cox, and the melancholy young yokel. It was a reasonably watertight hut; for the soil hereabouts was marshy in patches, and only here and there were underground shelters practicable. I reported to my new Colonel, Commandant Delbrassine. His headquarters were in a dugout, but his mess in a small wooden hut.

I found him and his adjutant about to dine, and dined with them. The meal passed pleasantly enough, but, to my astonishment, I discovered that there was no wine. We drank soda-water. After dinner, my new commanding officer invited me to his dug-out, and informed me as to everything it was requisite I should know. His polished style was a delight. I associate a never-failing easy courtesy with all three of my Belgian colonels—*Commandants*—under whom I was proud to serve. There was not one of these officers who on rising to use the telephone, although in the thick of a bombardment, would not first cry, *Excusez, Messieurs*.

The Brigadier—*Colonel*—when he visited my Commandant of that moment, Baron Wahis, took occasion to say, "Hare, here, is a clever fellow. He can hold his own in every conversation which crops up in the mess!"

I discovered that I was known as an English poet, as the

magazine *Colour*, to which I then contributed verse, was read by Belgian students of contemporary English letters.

One morning, when the Huns had presumably bombarded themselves into a state of exhaustion, Commandant Delbrassine brought me an early novel by Zola.

"It looks," said he, "as though we were in for a brief interval of calm." Most Englishmen think of Zola as a sordid realist. I don't want you to think that. His early work is in striking contrast with much that he wrote later. It has, I assure you, a very real vein of poetry in it."

This friendly gesture and criticism emanated from a soldier by profession who, in the course of twenty-five years' service, had won coveted distinctions. An English officer—if I may hazard that dangerous thing a generalisation—when he possesses culture, feels it incumbent upon him to conceal it, and affect an interest only in such matters as politics and sport. Yet many of the most famous soldiers of antiquity were men of high culture, and none more so than Julius Caesar himself, who besides being a discriminating judge of all the arts known to the Romans, was the first general, amongst the first historians, and with one exception, the first orator of his day. Serving with these Belgian officers, I felt that I was again in touch with that tough yet gracious thing, the European tradition; as it manifested itself, for instance, in the Elizabethans when a man could be, like Shakespeare's "Bassanio", a scholar and a soldier.

The Baron was a Latinist and laughed when—apropos of I forget what now—I quoted a mediaeval distich which expresses *good* wishes when read in the ordinary way, *forwards*, and *reverses* those wishes, without change of metre, when it is read *backwards*! I have never seen the thing in print so may perhaps misquote.

*Conditio tua sit stabilis nec tempore parvo
Vivere te faciat hoc Deus Omnipotens!*

Forwards: "May your condition flourish and Almighty God grant you to live *no short* time!" —

Backwards: "May Almighty God grant you to live a short time, and may your condition *not* flourish!"

"To whom was it sent?" asked the Baron, smiling.

"To some mediaeval Pope, I believe."

His face clouded immediately, for he was a good Catholic. His discomfort was but momentary. He was smiling again when he said, "I think we had better tell this of some *Cardinal*."

Once the Baron sent for me to his H.Q., in the dugout. I should have said that he was tall, spare, blue-eyed, and combined, as did they all, authority with suavity. I followed the runner, not without some slight apprehension lest he might tax me with failing in some point of duty. His appearance put me at once at my ease.

"Come down!" he cried.

So I climbed down the slippery wooden steps leading to his den under ground.

"You are an English poet," said he, "and now that it seems as though we were going to have a few minutes quiet, I thought I might employ the time in telling you some of our old Flemish legends about Thylle Ulenspiegel. They might inspire you with a poem, and they are good legends anyway."

And he told me there and then, without a trace of self-consciousness, of Thylle and his wife Nesle, and of their acquaintance with Lamme Goedsak: joyous personification of the Flemish *appetite!* We English have a coward's dread of ideas. Had it been so much as suspected amongst the "East-and-Wests" that I was a poet, they would have made it a point of honour to bait me. But fortunately for me, they read nothing but the football results. And yet: how many English poets have been soldiers, from Chaucer to the Elizabethans: Raleigh, Sidney and Ben Jonson; and thence to Byron and to Rupert Brooke!

The day I left Ypres to be Town Major at Dottignies, my companionable and good-looking Baron had his arm blown off. Of my contemporaries as regards age, I recall Rotsom, who was like myself in the early twenties. We struck at once into the liveliest terms of friendship, and as we were both of a rank, there was the less need of ceremony. Introducing himself to me, he said:

"We ought to find out, each of us, what interests the other. It usually furnishes a bond of sympathy when one discovers what intrigues the other fellow. We may find we have interests in common."

Being young, said I, "*Women!*"

"We shall never quarrel then!" cried Rotsom, with a shout of laughter, "unless we both fall for the same girl. And we shall have something to talk about for the rest of our lives."

"The rest of our lives". Poor devil! Three nights later, he collapsed on the parapet of a Hun trench; "*une balle de mitrailleuse dans la bouche.*" Friendships were short in the "Salient"

The combination of intelligence and culture, with such soldierly qualities as active courage, raised these men in my eyes above the "million". Commandant Delbrassine, for instance, prided himself upon his private picture gallery, in which he had acquired examples of "all the modern Flemish masters of landscape." I thought at this time, and I think now—there is no question of romanticising the past—that to be wiped out in such company would be no ignoble end.

We remained talking for some time, and when I left, it was late. I took a look-in at Cox and his melancholy companion—my two front line runners—to see if they were comfortably housed. They had a shack some fifty yards south of mine. I found them both fast asleep. Luckier than I, they contrived to slumber soundly through the ear-splitting roar of the barrage. I never learned to. Having seen to my men, I sought the semi-derelict plank hut which served me for combined bedroom and office. There were no dug-outs in my particular section since, being on the canal level, even as dug they filled with water. The roof was of corrugated iron, so that from the air, there was no defence. Trenches we had, but our enemy, water, made a continuous trench-system an impossibility.

I fell asleep in my clothes, covered by my "flea-bag", with my head on a pneumatic pillow—a luxury this!—which I blew up with my lips. I had a double row of sandbags before my hut, but not above two foot high. As I sank into an uneasy substitute for slumber, for I lay upon the ground, was tormented by cold, and normally wet to the skin, a rat which when I turned my flash-lamp upon him seemed almost as big as a kitten, passed jauntily over my chest.

That I might be on the alert at a moment of time, I had trained myself to lie with my left thumb-nail upon the switch of my flash-lamp, with my right forefinger upon the trigger of my revolver, and with my tin hat lying over my face. With practice, I acquired the knack of lying in this posture without fidgeting. But I was never really asleep until the rising sun gave me sufficient animal warmth to free me from the pain of cold. And this same sun brought out the stench from the dead.

I had a cemetery to my right, a cemetery to my left, both jockeyed-up wartime affairs with the rough deal crosses. Lying on the damp planks, a mortal chill would creep through me to the spine. When I turned, the same thing happened. Damp rose from the ground, and invaded one's whole system already

saturated with the wet. Once I found a decayed sack on the road. Though it was visibly crawling with insects, I hailed it as treasure-trove. Better the heart of a wasp's nest, than this slow approach to death by cold.

Animals are for the most part creatures of routine. The hare will follow daily his accustomed track through the grass. The dog expects his walk, at the usual hour. The rat, conformably with this order of things, ran across my chest nightly at the same hour. I fancy I lay blocking his hole. I indulged in playful fantasies about the rat of mine. I pictured him as fuming on those nights when I took an especially long time to settle down. I would adjust flash-lamp, revolver, tin-hat, air-pillow and then, until I felt the cold overcoming my power to support it, I would lie listening to the unceasing roar of the barrage, which began as early as nine-thirty.

From half intending to shoot the rat, I became attached to it. I would fancy it saying, "What a time Lieutenant Hare takes to settle in! But there, one can't expect him to guess that it's my club night!" Sometimes I amused myself by picturing the rat as standing before a mirror, getting into a dress-suit with tails, or tying his white tie in the neatest of little bows. I never had to wait long for him, so soon as I was lying still, but so silent was his approach, that until I actually felt his claws on my chest, I never guessed that he had left his hole. Sometimes—which was not pleasant—I felt the brush of his snake-like tail across my nose!

Years of undeterred access to garbage and to the dead, had made the rats, which were a peculiarity of the Salient, abnormally big. One of them bit the nose of a private in my battalion of the "East and Wests", and it swelled hideously. A shell smashed its way into the dug-out occupied by the officers of my old company. It did not burst, only staved in a tin hat which was lying on a packing-case, and broke a bottle of whisky. The liquor ran upon the ground, *and* the rats came forth from their holes and drank it. A Captain, a Londoner attached to the unit, told me later that, unnerved by those fierce pink eyes staring at him, he fairly quitted the shelter, and slept under the open sky.

I asked for, and obtained leave to go with my new unit on patrols. I was determined that nobody, ignorant of the responsibility which my work entailed, should suppose me a drone. I arranged with my Commandant, that Cox and one other runner, should be stationed in my hut so often as I left it; and

I ordered them to carry any despatch which should arrive in my absence, immediately to Headquarters.

Once when on a patrol of inspection, consisting of a Captain, myself, Sergeant and Corporal, we found ourselves, of a sudden, overhearing a party of Huns in animated conversation. We were in open country, but standing upon a length of duck-board, raised a foot above the swampy ground, causeway-fashion. We listened intently to the care-free conversation, but more especially the Captain, for he understood German.

We had stood thus a few minutes, with every muscle tense, hardly breathing, straining every nerve, when *crack!* Our shoddy causeway had given way, flinging us in all directions. My tin hat went flying, and striking some hard object, stone or metal, added to the din. We were opened upon by machine-gun fire at point blank range. I sprang forwards, gun in hand, but the Captain seized my wrist, gripping as though he meant to break it. His instinct was sound. We were not equipped for a fighting patrol. One cannot attack concealed pill-boxes with revolvers.

Standing if that were possible, yet more silently than before, we watched the red fire spitting from the machine-gun's muzzle in the darkness. So close were we that I could have reached the gun's muzzle with the point of a Thames punt pole. The gunner was leaving nothing to chance. North, East, South, South-West, he worked round the compass-card, slashing at darkness with his scythe of lead. But *why* did he never come full *West*? For there we stood, a yard maybe, beyond his sweep! *Why* did he always stop *just there*? No doubt the confused noise produced by four men falling in different directions, made identification of our precise position difficult, but one must be philosophic indeed, to remain untouched by superstition at such a moment. What invisible, incalculable force, was staying his hand?

The Ancients erected temples to Fortune. Cox, pagan as they, attributed all to Fate. "If there's a bullet with my name on it," he would say, "it will find me!"

Another piece of luck: *Why* were the Huns sending up no flares? If they had, we should have been as actors on a well-lighted stage. At last, tricked perhaps by our dead silence, the gunner gave over his task.

"*Nu bommen!*"—"Now they'll throw hand-grenades!"—my Captain whispered in my ear, as we wrenched our way through

the gluey clay, and succeeded in reaching a broken corner of splintered red brick which had once been a cottage. "*Nu bommen!*" he muttered again, between his teeth, but his diagnosis was incorrect, we had gone to ground. The shattered brick ruin was barely large enough to give cover to four men, but there are times when one makes no protest against overcrowding. Here close-packed in, we enjoyed a moment of intense relief and subdued triumph.

Up went their watch-fires. One!—Two!—Three!—lightening with brilliance mechanical as a harlot's smile, the grotesque panorama of rain and slime. Beneath those mechanised meteors, upon those glimmering mud-flats half sunk in ooze, some fantastic prehistoric monster almost brainless and wholly soulless, might fittingly contemplate this last development of the ingenuity of man, this new-old chaos to which Hun ferocity had reduced a laughter-loving Europe, with its thousand year tradition of culture and of art.

The night did not end without tragedy, although the patrol was spared. We stood watching the German flares until the last died out, and night and the rain resumed their uninterrupted sway. Then creeping on like cats, we made contact anew with the trenches, and the *Grenadiers Belges*. As we stood a moment shaking the stiffness out of our limbs, after the cramped position we had had to take up behind our pile of bricks, I heard a muffled sound immediately behind me, as though someone had flung down an old-fashioned carpet-bag. I turned about to see what had fallen, when a sergeant just in front of me leaped upon the fire-step, raised his rifle, levelled it so as to shoot through the narrow slit in the armour-plating of his look-out and fell at my feet.

Sighting his rifle by means of the radium-tipped sight which enables a man to aim accurately in the dark, a German sniper had shot the sentry on watch, who fell mortally wounded by a bullet which had just grazed his brain. (This sentry was what I had heard fall just behind me, and had thought nothing amiss.) The sergeant, who wished to avenge his friend, was killed in identical fashion. Both died lingering deaths. Human life was cheap as a dog's in the "Salient". As "a dog's"? Far cheaper! One does not willingly put a beloved dog to sleep.

This was one of the eerie things about Ypres, the way that every shell-hole which confronted one, so soon as night fell, appeared as though automatically, to house its sniper. One felt,

at times, as a man might lost in the jungle, who expects that from every dark hollow, the panther will spring. Something too one re-experienced of the child's irrational dread of darkness, his feeling that beyond the circle of light cast by the candle, lies the *inimical* region whence hostile eyes watch him, and bide their time.

Yet the stuff of comedy is always with us. One night the medical officer looked in at my shack for a talk. He was quivering in every limb, I supposed by some sort of ague brought on by the damp.

"Look at me!" he exclaimed. "I've got a temperature! If I get into hospital, they'll kill me!"

"Laughable admission," thought I, "for a doctor by profession."

"What will you do?"

"I shall drink a bottle of burgundy to-night—if such a thing can be come by in this least respectable suburb of Hell!—and take four aspirins . . ."

"How's the form?" I asked next day.

"The burgundy and the aspirins did the trick! I slept like a wolf—*j'ai dormi comme un loup!*—and I woke without a trace of temperature. I feel grand!"

But by nightfall, when he looked me up, he was shaking again. He shook, and shook.

"You know," he reiterated, and his tone really was pathetic, "they *will* kill me if they get me into hospital. *Nom de Dieu, de Dieu, de Dieu!* More aspirins and another bottle."

(Why did I not enquire of him from what Aladdin's cave he drew his burgundy? "Oh—but I was young, but I was young, when I was page to the Duke of Norfolk!")

"Well, Doctor? What's the bulletin this morning?"

"A perfect cure!" cries my medico rapturously. "The burgundy toned me up to such an extent that I was able, after I had drunk it, to *have a few drinks with the boys!*"

CHAPTER XI

ON LEAVE

WE had been pounded throughout the night more heavily than ordinarily by the Hun heavies.

"Did you get any sleep?" Delbrassine asked me.

"Half an hour, or so, *Mon Commandant*; when it grew warm enough. I dreamed of Dante's Hell!"

These men were mercurial and easily moved to smile.

"One can see you are a poet," said he, laughing. "I would wager heavily that you are the only man in the combined British and Belgian armies, who dreamed last night of Dante's Hell!—I'm looking you up for a minor diplomatic mission. The lorries which were bringing up our meat were knocked out by shell fire, and there'll be a trifling delay before we can get the next consignment up. Will you go to the 'O.C.' of your battalion of the East-and-Wests, explain the situation, and ask if he can possibly spare us a little bacon to go on with? Give him my best compliments, and assure him that if he finds himself short of supplies at any time we'll do our utmost to accommodate him."

I set off, in my usual fashion, on my own. I had been taken to task for going everywhere alone, when I had four runners, and if a message of any consequence were to be taken, I sent it off by a pair, so that if one man were killed, the other could get it through. But if the matter were of little consequence, I preferred to dispense with company and enjoy my thoughts. I did so on this occasion.

The Huns were shelling us, of course. Did they ever cease? And at this time, it was asserted, ninety-five per cent even of their high-explosive shells contained some proportion of gas also. This I could well believe, for the air stank. As I reached the cross-roads which the Tommies had christened "Dead End"—a notorious spot—a shell burst. The agony was excruciating. My mental processes were, for the moment, paralysed, and an insane belief possessed me that my ribs had been blown from my body. I stood there feeling for them when, assured by the feel that they were still intact, I next fancied that both my

legs were smashed. The delusion was favoured by the torments I was enduring.

I leaned forward and stooping down, endeavoured more exactly to ascertain the nature of my hurts. Such was my perturbation, that it never occurred to me that I should assuredly not be standing at all were tibia and fibia both broken! I was still searching and probing in my agony, when a quantity of stones crashed down on my tin hat. Had this been tilted at a sharper angle, as it would have had I been stooping lower, this falling rubble must have struck me not on the metal, but the back of my head. With what result? If lucky, death; if unlucky, perhaps, lunacy! I pulled myself together and examined my surroundings. An adjacent shell-crater had saved my life. Into this the projectile had fallen and burst; its scummy water was still in agitation.

Upon this incident, I later wrote the following:

DEAD END

As I came by Dead End, something happened. I searched for each bone,

Convinced that the ribs from my body, and shin.bones were gone. Things fell on my hat: it was solid: I walked after all, But not with that confident carriage which charms in Pall Mall.

Had that Five-nine not burst in a crater as big as a pond,
My present address had been West of the Back of Beyond;
I should now be a classic—Good Lord! I might even be read!
But better unknown and at supper than famous and dead.

A *jeu d'esprit* which appeared later in my volume, *New Poems* by Benn.

I entered Ypres, which I had viewed looking back on it from the front line, but had not before visited. There stood what Hun artillery had left of the famous Cloth Hall. I myself had watched almost a side of it crash earthward, and the resultant cloud of dust rise skyward. My friend, Lovat Fraser, the designer of the scenery and decorations for the *Beggar's Opera*, sketched that ancient monument to civic splendour from the trenches, and gave me a signed proof of the print he had made from it.

My Commandant had given me no exact locatiōn for the unit I was to seek. "They're in Ypres," he had said. "You have only to ask the first man you meet!" This sounded reasonable; but the difficulty was that Ypres appeared to contain no living

soul. I assumed that my men must be below ground, for there was assuredly no life above it. I began therefore, wherever beneath a heap of rubbish which had once been a house, I could discover a trace of what had once been a cellar, to call down in a voice like a *bos'un's*: "Anybody here?" Only echoes replied. Was this whole town a delusion? Had I come beneath a spell? Suddenly from somewhere behind me, I thought I heard a cat scream. I looked about. It was not a cat but a largish kitten which, still screaming, fairly ran towards me. A thing more miserable I have never seen. Famine had set her mark upon it, reducing it to bone and sinew. It resembled a cat's mummy, or a cat in caricature, sculptured by some morbid German artist. Still screaming, and showing its sharp teeth, it ran up to me. I caught it up, and perched it upon my shoulder.

"What am *I* to do?" one could fancy it saying. "What fault have *I* committed, that you men should blow my home to pieces, and reduce my warm kitchen to rubble." It was obviously in pain, but from hunger only. I could detect no wound. I soothed the little refugee as well as I could, and continued my hopeless quest, threading my way through piles of *débris* whilst shells burst with mournful regularity, now at a distance, now disconcertingly near.

At the openings into I don't know how many cellars, I repeated my mournful parrot-cry of "Anybody here?" in a voice which was becoming harsh as a hawker's. Then at last, in the open, I saw a fellow coming towards me, a Gunner officer, and asked him where the unit was that I was seeking.

"In the Ramparts," he told me, "Dickybusch way."

I told him that the cat was starving, explained that I was from the front line and returning to it, and asked if he could do anything for the little creature, as it was not in my power to keep it alive.

"Have you got a mess where an orderly could get it milk? Could you get it a *job* as a *mascot*?"

He laughed, took the cat, and promised to do his utmost. He pointed the direction I should take, and I trudged on towards the Ramparts. When I had gone some little distance, I looked back. He was still in sight and the cat was on his shoulder. I fancy that her troubles were at an end. I found the men I was seeking in a shelter beneath the historic Menin Gate. As I entered, they were removing their masks. The place stank of gas.

"Phew!" cried one of them, "they've been slinging it over! Did you get any of it?"

If every soldier below ground had been wearing his mask, that might explain the eerie silence everywhere which had so bewildered me. I found the O.C. who was, like Pinchbeck, an industrial when out of uniform.

"Major, I've come along from the *Grenadiers*, with a message from their O.C. They've had their food lorries shelled, and the poor devils are really short of rations. The Commandant asked me to give you his compliments and explain the situation. He thought perhaps, as our respective battalions are in *liaison*"—I was making no sort of progress—"he thought, perhaps: he sent me with the politest possible request for: a little bacon; *of course*, if you could spare it. As we are in *liaison*, you see? Could this, do you think, be managed? He said, of course"—the Arctic silence is beginning to infect me also, by this time—"he said, the Commandant did, that he was only too anxious to accommodate *you*, if ever *you* should find yourself in the same situation."

I was exhausted with my tramp down from the line, and with the shattering experience of having been only just *not* blown to smithereens, and I was wishing to Jupiter that somebody would stand me a drink. The Major did not appear to me to be thinking: just sitting. At last he condescended to return from the moon.

"Ready money!"

"I'm sorry, Sir?"

"Ready money!"

"But, Sir, I don't seem to have made myself clear. It wasn't a commercial suggestion. The poor devils are actually in a hole, and of course we are supposed to be working in close touch with them. The Commandant is dead sincere in saying that he'd help you if you were short of anything: all in it together, you know, and that sort of thing. He's a real sportsman: you'd like him."

"Ready money!"

"But, Sir, after all—don't think it damned cheek of me—but one wants to keep up good relations: the *entente* and that sort of thing. I don't think they want *much* bacon."

"Go ahead, Major," cries Pinchbeck, "they may give you a decoration for it!"

"Ready money!" said the Major again. He was clearly a man of one idea. I had played the diplomat to no purpose.

Why had I not at least brought Cox with me, that right-thinking man? He would have been company on the road, and would have helped with the parcel which I intended to carry back. I was ready to sink with physical exhaustion, so I stood myself a double whisky at their canteen, and ordered there and then, two guineas' worth of tinned salmon. My reason for not buying more was simple. I doubted my capacity to carry the burden over so long a road as that back to our positions, through night, shelling, and pestilential exhalations! *Serpens, sitis, ardor, arenae.*

I tracked back with the weight of all my salmon tins, disillusioned and depressed. I had failed. I felt hacked to death, when I reported at the Commandant's H.Q. in the dug-out. With a view to saving the situation, said I—

"*Mon Commandant*, it's just sheer, unforeseeable bad luck. The East-and-Wests have had *their* lorries knocked out too and the men are all grouching like the Devil about having nothing to eat. The O.C. says that nothing would have pleased him more than to send you everything he'd got to spare. It just isn't in his power! In the meantime, with all his good wishes and excuses, he thought that these few tins of salmon might come in handy for your officers' mess!"

My Commandant had no means of divining that the Major to whom he had sent me had given me a categorical refusal, that he had left me to pay for this stuff, and had not so much as deputed a fatigue to help me carry it. He stared at the infernal cargo with a disillusioned eye. It was not much truly for one in his situation, *in loco parentis* to a thousand hungry men! I had the impression that only innate good breeding kept him from relieving his feelings with oaths. The atmosphere became—or seemed to me in my exhausted state to become—glacial. The moment circumstances permitted, I beat a retreat. Why in Hell had I attempted to smoothe over a tricky situation? Why in justice to myself had I not told him that the salmon was *mine*? Once again I had almost garrotted myself with my "old school tie"! Humanity was a mistake. I would turn to the brute creation for sympathy. I looked forward to my rat's arrival, and the nocturnal brush of his tail against my face. . . .

Delbrassine was normally the most genial of men. His sense of humour was *sui generis*. One night when the Hun heavies were bombarding us with their customary ear-splitting din, he took it

into his head to indulge in a travesty of the more sentimental type of *feuilleton*—

Sounds of military activity without: Crash! Sper-loosh!

DELBRASSINE: I love the quiet coming on of eve—

THE HUN (*strafing*): Crash! zip-zip-zip! Cloosh!

DELBRASSINE: That hour never fails to cast its dreamy spell upon my spirit, and a gentle melancholy invests me, I know not why.

THE HUN (*strafing*): Zee-ee-ee-ee-hoomp!

DELBRASSINE: Afar off, a dog barks, an owl utters his strange wooing note—

THE HUN (*strafing*): Zip-zip-zip!

DELBRASSINE: And earth meets Heaven in breathless peace—

A dump explodes with sounds which defy phonography!

Our worst night was that in which the Allies retook that ever-disputed hill, Mont Kemmel, there at our backs. This height offered immense advantages to whichever side possessed it, for as it was the only hill for many miles about, it served as a natural observation post. The Huns captured it in their first onslaught. The British recaptured it. Again the enemy carried this position. To-night it appeared that the British had yet again recaptured it; it was to be devoutly hoped for the last time.

I was in my shack when a couple of runners entered and saluted. The foremost delivered me the following. It was by no means a model of epistolary efficiency, for the message, written in obvious haste, bore neither date, hour of despatch, nor map-reference—that is, no address—nor so much as the name or rank of the sender.

SECRET

Des messages téléphoniques reçus de la division à 9.30 disant que le Boche n'est plus au Kemmel et signes d'une retraite générale sur le front.

Observations spéciales à faire pour obtenir n'importe quelles indications d'une action ennemie de ce genre.

It was with a feeling of exhilaration that I raced round to the Commandant's dug-out with this heartening document. The Commandant decided upon sending out an observation patrol to examine into the situation and report; he ordered, however, that all equipment, as for a fighting patrol, should be carried by the party, bombs, machine-gun, and so forth in case unexpected opposition were encountered. An old campaigner of many years'

standing, Delbrassine was not going to be stampeded into over hasty action. He neglected nothing that caution could suggest, or human foresight predict.

The Lieutenant who was to take charge of the expedition—the laughing boy who said that, as we were both interested in women we should have something to talk about for the rest of our lives—was summoned into the dug-out, and an exhaustive study of the route projected, was made in advance upon a large-scale map. He was to proceed by “Caliban Trench”, and so on, and so forth. The patrol fell in, forty strong, and all in high feather. The Huns were in retreat! The end of the war was in sight.

They had hardly set out before the enemy began to bombard us with quite extraordinary impetuosity and violence. I heard the observation volunteered that we were opposite a dump, and that the Huns were determined to hold out so long as a single round of ammunition remained to them: truth perhaps; rumour more probably. To my inexperienced eyes and ears, it seemed unlikely that so much as a mouse would escape alive from the “Salient” this night! No words can convey any conception of it; it was incredible; fantastic

In the thick of the turmoil, an airman—English, it was said—flew up from his remote aerodrome, hung poised awhile like a hawk above our heads, and dropped, with deliberation, six bombs above our positions! Though not absorbing, map-reading is really an *important* subject! Night wore on. The grey began to show in the east. The tornado continued. The patrol did not return. The Commandant and I grew sick of looking at our wrist-watches. At last! A sergeant appeared at the entrance above us.

Entrez, mais entrez!

He was one of the patrol. He had been sent back to report. He climbed down the wooden stairs unsteadily. For a moment, I thought him drunk. He gazed wildly from one to the other of us, reeled, and vomited.

Mais prends une chaise, mon gars!

His report was simple. Except himself, they all were dead.

“But So-and-So?”

“Dead.”

“And So-and-So?”

“All dead, *mon Commandant*, except myself. I should have preferred to remain and die with my comrades——”

"But the Lieutenant?"

"He also. On the parapet of the Boche trench: *une balle de mitrailleuse dans la bouche*. I thought it my duty to steal back in the darkness and confusion, and when I spied an opportunity, I did so. We were sent out to report, *mon Commandant*. I have come back to report." The Commandant dismissed the sergeant with words of encouragement and congratulation.

"Your initiative was admirable. In returning to report, you did your duty. Now you must try to get some sleep."

So soon as he had dismissed the sergeant, the Commandant flung out his arms on the little trestle-table on which his maps were spread, laid his head on them and sobbed like a child.

"Et c'est moi qui l'envoyais à sa mort!"

Fearful of intruding upon his grief, with a murmured, "Good-night"—the irony of words—I left him. As I looked from the entrance to his dug-out, it seemed to me that the Huns must have advanced. They were whipping the dark with a barrage of machine-gun bullets at—so I judged—but a yard or four feet above the ground. To stand upright would be to commit suicide. I took what cover dips in the ground and shell-craters afforded. Now I crept low upon hands and knees, now I crawled forwards at full length. The sound of machine-gun bullets was such as one might fancy a lunatic producing, were he to stab frantically and incessantly at a tightly stretched canvas sheet.

Back in my quarters of thin planking, I got into my sleeping-bag, less to sleep—for a despatch might arrive from one moment to another—than to keep warm; and because only by lying could I obtain cover behind my sand-bags which rose but two feet above the ground, I laid my tin hat over my right cheek, held my revolver, finger upon trigger, in my right hand, and my flash-lamp in my left, and before I could settle myself, was flung through the air, clean across the shack! I heard a crash as my tin hat struck the planking; my flash-lamp and revolver were Lord knows where!

On searching next day, I found a five-nine in my low wall of sand bags. Entering by the bond, it had buried its nose two inches deep in one of the inner sand-bags against which I was accustomed to lie whilst sleeping. A dud, of course; or I should not be writing these memoirs. Meanwhile I was plunged in pitchy darkness, and unarmed. I had no intention of allowing a raiding patrol to surprise me in this condition, or to slaughter me like a sheep.

Systematically I searched square-foot by square-foot, until I put my hand first on my flash-lamp—which was broken and would not light—and later on my tin hat and gun. Feeling my way back, I again got into my sleeping-bag, and slept waking, cat-fashion, with my finger on the trigger of my revolver. I discarded the now useless lamp. I was in the dark, yes; but I had a weapon, and were a raiding party to enter, I reasoned that they would show lights, and that by their own lights, I would shoot.

But now another thought struck me. What if a Hun patrol were merely to throw a bomb or two in upon me without troubling their heads about investigating further? Better be alert! To be in total darkness was ridiculous. I set out exploring again, stumbling through the dark, until I laid my hand upon what I had been hunting for, a candle-end and matches: the candle by whose indifferent flame I used to decipher the messages. Both were as wet as though they had been kept in a tub! It had rained the week through; everything was saturated with moisture. Not one match could I get so much as to splutter!

I got back into my sleeping bag to think the situation over again, and fell immediately into a profound slumber; profound because my heart was already affected, and the chances of my waking again were not such as you would bet on. I did wake, however, to realise that I was being gassed! Rain had weakened the force of the attack, and I had shutters to my single window, but these last were not provided with anti-gas curtains, and so were powerless to exclude the stuff. I was coughing violently. My mask: where was it? The accursed lamp *would* let a man down! My gas mask would normally have lain within arm's reach upon my sleeping-bag, but the same shock which sent my lamp, hat and gun to the Devil, had carried that away too! Another paroxysm of coughing shook me, and the imminent threat of diarrhoea sent me crawling out again into the open, beneath the sweeping machine-gun fire, to discover the nearest hollow place in the ground. I was in the extremity of torture. I felt as though I had swallowed broken glass.

"Well?" said the Commandant, when we met the following morning, "they sent it over, didn't they? I suppose you had your mask on?"

"No, *mon Commandant*."

"*What!* then why aren't you black in the face?"

The bombardment from the Hun positions which had begun with intensity at nine-thirty the preceding night, ceased at half-

past eleven the morning after. I shaved at my nickel pocket-mirror, using water—all that I could ever come by in the "Salient"—dreadfully polluted by the bodies of the dead. Our drinking-water was some effervescent stuff from stoppered bottles.

The Commandant, his Adjutant, and I forgathered for *déjeuner* in the "Mess Hut"—a contraption the size of a bathroom—and I recall my astonishment to find *both* alive! I cannot describe that meal as a gay affair. The gassing was giving me such acute pain in the bowels that I was hard put to it to keep myself from writhing. I had to concentrate with all my might to keep the quivering of my hands and lips from becoming perceptible to my companions.

The mess orderly brought in the stew. A muddier apparition one cannot imagine! And he wore *only* pants and vest! There was mud in his hair. There was mud on his pants: they might have been laundered with a trowel! There was mud—lumps of it—between his toes! "Sit still," said I to myself, almost forgetting my pain in my amazement, "if others see this goblin, then it *exists!*" Having arrived at this philosophical conclusion, I glanced covertly at the Commandant. Ah! then he shared my vision. His eye was glazed with rage. He took a mouthful of stew: then spat it on the floor. He brought down his fist with a crash on the table, arresting by this gesture, the Spectacle which was attempting to steal away in flight.

The table was flimsy camp-equipment stuff. Its thin legs bent and rebounded. The glasses rocked and fell. And as he struck, the *Commandant* bellowed, his voice rising in a crescendo, "*Ton ragoût n'est pas fameux : et tu es DÉGOÛTANT—Toi!*"

The culprit bolted.

I fancy he had been overtaken by the bombardment at a moment when he had removed trousers and tunic for an attempt to dry them. He had gone to ground, without them, in some mud-hole, and had overslept. In this artless disarray he had prepared his *ragoût* and before he had had time to leap into his normal attire, had been pushed, in the state in which we had beheld him, into the awful presence of his Battalion Commander, by *some joker!* Jokers never were respectable people.

But all this is theorising, youth of to-day, fresh from a course of economics, foreign affairs, dress-making, bee-keeping, biology, economics, English literature and psychology, will prefer to attribute the Orderly's irrational behaviour to pre-natal inhibitions

and complexes; to somnambulism in the mother, exhibitionism in the father, and cretinism in the whole family. I encountered this victim of the Commandant's wrath a few hours later, when he overwhelmed me with embarrassing apologies.

"This war," said he, "*mon Lieutenant*, is driving me crazy! Even if I get out of it alive and don't go mental, I shall never be my own man again. Perhaps I might gain a living fishing: up some back-water. . . ."

Leave! There is magic in the word. And how weary I am of the continental poplar. I shall see English trees again!

A ROUNDEL OF TREES

Trees with their leaves? Well, of course, unless winter mars,

Or the East, like a brigand, the copse of its gold bereaves:
But not on the Vlamertinghe road, where the gas-shell jars

Trees with their leaves,

Where they stand as the trees stand in Hell, and my whole soul
grieves

For the hideous toothpicks, the shell-slashed, liver-hued spars,

Which for foliage bear camouflage net, that no bird deceives!

We're on leave though, thank God! for a country of trees without
scars,

Trees worthy of Marion and Robin and all the thieves:

Such trees as drink dew, and whisper tales to the stars:

Trees with their leaves!

But although autobiographers agree to pass the matter over, there are other phenomena of bounteous nature which are to the full as attractive, indeed even a trifle more so than trees. One grave young gentleman goes to the lake-district. He passes the time of day with that familiar figure, the village postman, and his Aunt refuses to call upon him until the last day of his leave, for fear of taking him away from his mother. The Aunt borrows him for a quarter-of-an-hour, and the couple sit together for some brief but delicious moments, discussing his first cricket match, and watching the bats. Another young fellow—but you may read it all in their books!

SHORT SKIRT

Trim calf and hip-line have the power

To lend to many a dreary hour,

When cares like vultures are a-building:

A touch of royal blue and gilding!

What an extraordinary place London was during the war! Every street seemed to possess its willing damsel, even as, in Classical times, every copse and every stream could boast its nymph. I had been dining at the "Eiffel Tower" and was walking homewards. The evening had passed off merrily enough. I was leaving Shaftesbury Avenue and just entering Piccadilly Circus, when she smiled at me. It was by no means the sort of smile that one associates with that haunted locality. Her furs were sable, and her shoes, and so much of her stockings as showed beneath her coat, were surely of the daintiest that Bond Street had to show!

"Good evening!"

"Good evening!"

Thought I, *no!* This will mean champagne and a night-club. The money won't run to it. My hand must have gone instinctively to my pocket: an unfortunate gesture which she perfectly understood, but interpreted with kindness and tact.

"Oh! but you have enough for a taxi, I'm sure!"

"Oh, for *that*, yes."

How awkward men are! How we all miss that agreeable finesse which is so integral a part of every woman's make-up! Whilst I was opening the door for her, she gave the driver her address. I didn't catch it, and I was far too intrigued by the fair unknown to study the road. We might have been driving to the moon!

"May I ask you a personal question?"

"Of course!"

"Your complexion suggests Scotland; no other country runs to just that type of heavenly milk-white, yet your accent has a suspicion of French about it. Where do you hail from?"

"You are very observant! I get my complexion from my father's family. They were all Scots. But my mother was French, and that was my nursery language. My husband is a Scot, too, an engineer, but we have lived in France a great part of our lives."

"Your—husband?"

"Oh, don't look disappointed! He enlisted almost at the outbreak of the war. He was taken prisoner in the first rush, and has been in a Boche prison-camp ever since. Will you have a liqueur?"

So abrupt a question made me smile. I thought there must be a "catch in it"! But no. From a pocket in her small fur muff, she drew a collapsible travelling-cup, and a flask of Kirsch.

"I always carry one with me."

We drank in the taxi.

"*Santé, Madame!*"

"*Santé, Monsieur!*—Here we are. Now be as quiet as a mouse. Follow me on tip-toe. We mustn't make a sound or we shall wake up the little McFish!"

The furniture of her room was such as went with the sables. The bed was either a Hepplewhite, or an excellent imitation. A plain biscuit-coloured wallpaper without pattern. Few pictures, but good. On a diagonal line from the bed was a child's cot with curtains of peach-coloured silk. Although she had cautioned me against waking the child, she could not refrain from doing so herself, but picked him from his cot and cuddled him: a Cupid of a boy with rosy cheeks, snowy-white limbs, and a quantity of the crispest golden curls. I observed that when she was excited that French accent which normally one could hardly detect, became pronounced.

"Fes he not *sweet*, de leetle McFish?"

The young clansman opened a blue eye, surveyed me drowsily and closed it again. Then with both eyes shut, he held out his arms instinctively for his mother's embrace. A return to life's prosaic affairs, and the accent was hardly noticeable. She returned Cupid to the cot.

"I'm afraid I can give you nothing very nice for supper. Can you make do with bread and cheese?"

"Rather! I should think so. I've been to a Club dinner as a matter of fact, so I'm really not hungry; but I can enjoy bread and cheese at any time!"

"No; don't help, please. You'll make a noise. I'll go to the larder and bring the things in myself."

She brought a new loaf, Camembert, butter, celery.

"Can you drink Kirsch?"

We drank it from Hock glasses.

"Tell me about the little McFish. He is the image of you. Do you see anything of your husband in him?"

"No; but then I shouldn't, for he isn't my husband's. His father is what I think you would call my 'fancy'. I have named him 'Charles' after my husband: Charles, Augustus McFish. My husband doesn't know. I don't know what will happen quite."

She thrust out her manicured hands with the oddest gesture, yet one that I found captivating. Her hands fluttered as though they were birds, and the jewels upon her slender fingers sparkled.

"Tell me about your 'fancy'?"

"He was a German, but a *dear* man. There *are* nice Germans, you know. He sobbed like a girl when he had to leave me to be interned!—My husband, Charles, behind wire there in Germany! My Ernst—Oh! it is horrible!—in a cage here, in England! This war, *mon ami*, is a disaster for women!"

"You must be terribly lonely!"

Thank Heaven my irony went unperceived.

"I am: *terribly*! I have a dear friend, a gentleman from Brighton: Hové. But he could not come here to-night. Business, war-business, always business! This war is a disaster, a disaster, I tell you!" There was rage in her voice. "It is the women who suffer most!" But all this was getting me nowhere.

"It's no disaster for *me*: to-night!"

This changed her mood. She had been discarding her clothes all this while, and now, with an alluring rustle, what yet remained slipped to the carpet, and from a pool of silks, she emerged as naked as a little silver fish. A glance! A leap! She was on the bed: was in it: had snapped out the lights. But the coals burned up brightly. . . .

It is inevitable that wartime should sharpen sensibilities. It is Nature's attempt to replace loss with store. It is as though Science, the Giant, and Nature, the Giantess, played one another at chess, for directly contrary stakes; she for the preservation, he for the annihilation of the human race.

"I shall wipe them out!" cries Science, in his Hun accent.

"You will not," says Nature, "I play her husband."

"And I take him: So! And trow him into a cage!"

"I play her 'fancy'."

"And him take I also: So! And I trow him into dis oder cage!"

"I play the Gentleman from Brighton."

"I blow him to bits. He vill sleep sound to-night!"

And with a huge handkerchief, Science mops his head, upon the shaven crown of which rare pig-bristles stand *en brosse*.

The Giantess is as ruthless as the Giant, but unlike him, she has infinite patience.

"I play," says she, "the little Charles, Augustus McFish!" . . .

But not all susceptibilities appear to be sharpened by war. Captain O'Blank had been arguing heatedly against the "immorality", as he terms it, of presenting the nude on the "halls". Such "exhibitions" ought "not to be allowed!"

"But Heavens, O'Blank, they do no sort of harm, and give pleasure to thousands! Besides: have you no aesthetic sense? The girl you're looking at is not just *any* girl. She's chosen for her symmetry, perhaps from hundreds, precisely as one might choose an artist's model. She's a masterpiece of nature, my boy, and if it gives you pleasure to contemplate her, you have as much right to do so, as you have to look at a sunrise, or the moon! The thrill she gives you is part of your 'perks' as man upon this planet!"

"But what *is* there to see in a nude woman?" demands O'Blank completely mystified, "I'd *much* rather look at a horse!"

CHAPTER XII

UNDER THE ROSE

CONFESS and be hanged! At this period of my life, I seem to myself in retrospect, to have been totally unable to resist the charm of women. I was as one bewitched. I had been to the "Empire". They had abolished the famous "Promenade" in which, together with the *Folies Bergères*, Paris offered the two most enchanting beauty shows in Europe. "Hypocrisy to abolish it," thought I, "they can't abolish life, then why suppress the pageant?"

I walked out from the brightly lit theatre, into the heart of as thick a London fog as I had ever known, and climbed the stairs of a Haymarket 'bus. Even as I was getting to my seat, out went the street lights! Odd of the Huns to choose a moonless night for a raid. But perhaps the moon had been shining before this fog rolled up, and enveloped the city which gave it birth. A passenger sat beside me, and after a brief interval, a small hand lightly brushed my own. I reached out in the now pitchy darkness, missed, then located it.

I laid mine on it gently, so as not to cause alarm in case her gesture had been accidental. I hoped to give the impression that I was wrapped in thought, and hardly realised what my hand was doing. She let it rest on hers, and after a discreet delay, I ventured upon a slight pressure. It was reassuringly returned.

"Charing Cross!" came the voice of the conductor, in tones which many a fog and many a pint had rendered mellow.

"Hullo! My stop!"

The small hand gripped and held.

"Oh, *Charing Cross*," said I, "did he say *that*? I don't want Charing Cross; a most uninteresting place I always think."

"I thought there must be a li'l mistake!"

So my invisible friend was a South American, to judge from her lazy, drawling, softly-pretty accent. Fog continued, and the black-out. I had never known darkness so absolute. Was she a blonde? So my fancy insisted upon picturing her. We now conversed freely, but in whispers, leaning towards one another, for you can never tell who may be eavesdropping.

"We're almost there," she whispered at last.

"Where is 'there'?"

"We're some way along the Vauxhall Bridge Road. I live about twenty minutes from here. Here we are! Do you mind a walk? We'll never find a taxi, a night like this."

"Oh, that's all right. But can't we get a drink?"

"There's no hotel hereabouts. It'll have to be a really low pub. Do you mind?"

"No, of course I don't mind, if you don't?"

"No. I'm not afraid with you."

The pub certainly was low. But what took me by surprise was the metamorphosis of the girl from the creature of my imagination to that of fact. She laughed at my astonishment. In the bright light of the saloon bar, she stood revealed as an olive-skinned Creole with sparkling black eyes beneath upward-sweeping lashes, and with a mop, beneath her hat, of crisply curling hair as dead black as a tablet of Indian ink. As she laughed at the astonishment I suppose I still showed, she revealed teeth that were perfectly shaped, regular, and sparkling white. To cover my confusion, I said, "But do you know you have just done a really silly thing? I wonder how you dare pick up a perfectly strange man in a black-out on a 'bus. I might have been a dreadful man! I might have been an assassin!"

"Oh, no!" she replied with perfect self-possession. "Before the lights went out, I *marked you down*!"

Impossible not to laugh! I was going to find her a conversationalist. We sat at a metal-topped table as far as possible from the bar, and the seedy rabble drinking at it. I had never in my life before found myself in such scrubby company. My friend might well refer to this haunt as "low"! Whilst waiting for the landlord to take my order, I overheard a slightly sozzled tough, with a bull neck and a dirty handkerchief knotted about it, exclaim truculently: "But they *didn't mean* ter do 'im in, don't I keep telling yer? 'E was the second of them Oxford boys they done in, but both was *accidents*! With this bloke, they only didn't want him to see what wasn't no concern of his'n. So they 'doped 'im ter git 'im out of the 'ouse quick. They were jus' going ter leave 'im in a doorway, or somethink like that. They done 'im in by giving 'im too much."

"Oxford boys', eh?" thought I, and ordered the drinks in what I hoped was a Cambridge accent. I returned with them to

the tin table. A mole could have seen that her figure must be little short of perfection.

"What about another 'double'?"

"What about doubling the 'doubles'? It's just on twelve, so they'll be about the last we'll get. Thank the Lord they don't seem to have heard here yet, about this new imbecility of closing at *ten*!"

We drank the double-doubles, and had time for just one more double-double apiece.

"And now," says Mamie, "we'll jus' have to foot it out!"

Her house was one of a terrace that was Victorian to the very pattern of the machine-made lace curtains of her bedroom, but comfortable and spotlessly clean. She had introduced roomy arm-chairs, and had them covered in gay modern cretonnes. She lighted the fire in a jiffy.

"Is this house yours?"

"While I stay in London; I hate hotels. Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity, Mamie, I suppose."

In those days, I had a thirst for caresses, and my new-found companion possessed in perfection the art of bestowing them. Colours suited Mamie. She could wear them. She slipped off all formal attire, and covered what was left, with a wrap as gaudy as a most expensive parakeet. It came in handy for taking off. Early tea was brought to our room, and a most excellent breakfast soon afterwards, by a trim little servant in cap and apron trimmed with machine-made lace like the curtains, and all very prim and starchy. Mamie was obviously "going English".

"Breakfast, Modom. Is there anything further that Modom will require?"

"That's all, thanks. Put the things upon the trivet to keep warm."

Mamie went to a coffee apparatus, and soon the whole room was full of the fragrant aroma of good coffee in preparation.

"I always make my own. I jus' can't bear your English coffee."

"Neither can I. I'm thinking of emigrating!"

Breakfast over, we retired for the day, as formerly for the night.

"Will Modom be desiring lunch in?"

Modom would be: and five o'clock tea, in due course. She came down with me into the hall at last, and we took so long seeing one another off, that had I not been tied absolutely by

an invitation which I could not, with decency, cancel by a last-minute wire, I should have bade her dress and come out with me to dinner. So often as we kissed, she stood on tip-toe to make herself taller. There was no need for it. She was little, and she was pretty. And what a thrill to look downwards on the shapely feet—shapely and little!—so beautifully kept with their pink-stained nails.

As she drew close for a parting embrace—*but close!*—that intelligent garment came open—her wrap which was as gaudy as a most expensive parakeet—and it required no imagination to divine Pygmalion's ecstasy when he clasped living sculpture to his heart! Still standing on her pink-stained toes——

"Good-bye, Soldier," she whispered, "you have always a home to go to when you choose . . . !"

Despite a gruelling evening, night, and morning, the Huns were—as my previously-quoted despatch suggested—leaving the Ypres Salient. We had been precipitate, that was all. We were now to emerge from our "bivvies", dug-outs, and trenches, and return to the road. Vivid recollections of this period flash before the mental eye.

I was again with the "East-and-Wests" when we entered Mouscron, a styleless town of factories and suburban brick. No gables here, as at Bruges, to delight the eye; no belfries to scatter the gay pattern of a folk-song across the air; no stone faces in grotesque to grin at us from spout or gutter. We came upon no chimney, above the faggots on whose glowing hearth a witch might hang a kettle. Mouscron has no dormer-windows from which, with jewelled hand, a princess might throw a blossom to her favoured knight. No saint looked down from his niche, within the nimbus of his candle-light, to testify to man's triumph over his enemy Time. No cobbled alleys of the Middle Age opened before us, along whose winding ways, angels might walk, to visit the habitations of just men.

Machine-gun fire, with its infernal zip-zip-zip, rattled still, with intermittent bursts, from the far side of the town, but grew fainter as we approached. Battalions ahead were mopping up the snipers, and no immediate action was demanded of us. As we drew near the centre of the town, our progress assumed the character of a triumph. Adapting themselves with difficulty to our quick light-infantry step, young women ran alongside our column of march, crying, "*Vive le roi Georges!*" and "*Vive l'Angleterre!*"

They gave us flowers for our buttonholes, and paper bags of hot chipped potatoes. They poured steaming-hot coffee into cups, which they insisted on us drinking as we marched, a difficult feat whilst keeping time. In the Market Place, a band of the kilted Black Watch were playing the pipes, marching up and down as they played, decoratively peacocking, to the demonstrative admiration of the girls.

Wherever we went, the best of billets were accorded us, and we officers had beds whoever went without. That night, we had rabbit pie for dinner in the company's mess. A tame rabbit, the pet of the landlady and her family, whom they had concealed from the covetous eyes of the gluttonous Huns, was slaughtered for our dinner; so determined were they that we should not lack for good cheer. Throughout the German occupation, such of the civilians as had remained at Mouscron, had dragged out an existence in cellars. Food was at famine prices, and substitutes had to be found for even such commodities as shoe-leather, which are normally taken for granted. The women of our billets wore shoes and slippers of which the uppers were of canvas, and the soles of rope. This appeared to be the general wear.

"Do they keep out water?"

"No, not very well."

Our landlady assured us that when the Boches wanted an unwilling woman, they simply smashed the cellar doors with axes, and dragged her out. "The noise alone of their breaking in the door, was terrifying."

My rest billet, as opposed to that which combined Mess and Company Headquarters, was in a house facing the railway station. A shell struck the roof on my first night, bursting luckily somewhere beyond us. The house rocked, but didn't collapse. It is amazing how elastic that seemingly solid thing a house can be! I went down a floor to a room where we had two men billeted, to see if either, or both of them were wounded. I found them sitting up in bed, their hair and bedding littered with plaster from the ceiling, lustily singing:

"Where did that one go to, Chummy,
Where did that one go?
Say now, Chummy,
Ain't that rummy?
Tell me if you know——"

They laughed sheepishly as I came upon them thus occupied. As I looked towards the railway station, next morning, I saw what the shell which had grazed the roof of our billet had destroyed. The station lavatory had taken wing, except for two seats, which rose forlorn and ludicrous, lacking walls or roof.

As I walked about the streets after breakfast, exploring the town, I perceived an exceedingly pretty brunette. She was well-bodied and a trifle above medium height. Dark but blue-eyed. Perhaps I should have remarked her the less, had not a second woman, aged and wrinkled, come up at the moment, and stood confronting the first, shaking her fist at her, and shrieking insults at her in a patois of which I couldn't understand a syllable. The old hag's screaming attracted a mob, and as this grew and grew, coming towards her from all sides, and so cutting off her retreat, my beauty stood panic-stricken, gibbering with fear. Another Lieutenant, not from my contingent, joined me. He might have been twice my age, and I set him down as a provincial solicitor in his civil capacity. Women were pouring in now from every quarter, whooping like witches!

"Can't we help her?"

"They'd only take it out of her worse when we were gone!"

Suddenly the mob of women surged forwards, and went over the girl, trampling her like a herd of stampeding beasts!

"One thing only," says my solicitor, "could have saved her: if we'd had a fast car, and the means of getting her out of this bloody country! But she'll be dead now: no use to worry!"

The swarm began now rapidly to melt away. Of their victim literally no trace was visible. Having trodden her to pulp, some of them must have thrust what was left of her body into a coal-hole or dust-bin. I mentioned this horrible incident to our landlady, at the billet where we had Mess and Company H.Q. This normally kindly soul, who had given up her bed to us and, as we learned later, had been sleeping on the kitchen table, showed supreme unconcern.

"Oh, those girls!" she exclaimed, "they relied on their German lovers to protect them. Now they're getting what they deserved all along. They had all the good food, and fun, and wine, whilst we were starving: huh! It's veal to-night: do you like veal?"

Some girls who had had German lovers, had their heads shaved to the bare scalp, were stripped naked, carried up to the house-tops, and then left for hours together on the roofs, pilloried in

cold and rain, and at that terrifying height above the cobbles, in the sight of all. And in every case it was the beauties who suffered, for they alone were the pursued and courted and bribed, and now betrayed. I was informed by not a few Belgians of instances where this ferocious punishment had been inflicted.

An hotel-keeper assured me that to his personal knowledge, no fewer than six girls had been thus publicly humiliated and tortured. He instanced a waitress in a certain town I knew well, as one of the victims. He mentioned the café where she had worked. I remembered her perfectly as, by an odd coincidence, she had often waited on me. She had been a striking girl of medium height; blonde, blue-eyed, extremely shapely, and neat. To anticipate a little, I chanced after the Armistice, to enter a small tobacconist's in a suburb of Brussels, for a packet of cigarettes.

"You remember me, don't you?" said the girl behind the counter.

"Yes! Wait a moment——"

"E.—of the *Café Bluet*?"

Now I recognised her. She was wearing a silk mob-cap, ornamented with pale blue ribands, a type of head-gear which I had never seen before except in old prints or on the stage. She noticed my astonishment—she could hardly fail—and said, "I have had a severe attack of typhoid fever, and my Doctor insisted upon my having my head shaved."

Poor girl . . .!

I had had experience of trench-warfare; after we left Mouscron, I had a glimpse of the open fighting also. I had been sent forward to investigate some front-line positions which my company were to take over. My party consisted of four Second Lieutenants and myself. Whilst we were moving up, in flat, exposed country, the Huns began to drop bombs from a 'plane, now here, now there, in a pattern about us. Always roughly equidistant from us, the points which the bombs made in falling advanced nearer to us on every occasion of their being dropped. They intended to amuse themselves with us, before, with the last discharge, wiping us out entirely. I have little use for "popular" humour anywhere; but surely none but Huns could stoop to such ape-like antics!

Yet now comes an astonishing turn of what, for want of a better term, one must call "good luck". My party assumed that

all was over with us when, right at my feet, I caught sight of a round hole in the ground, of a diameter of a foot-and-a-half, or two feet. Had there been a house here by, I should have assumed it to have been a coal-hole connecting with a cellar underneath.

"Look!" cried I, "this must lead somewhere! In you go! We'll dodge them yet!"

"Not I!" cried one of the party, catching my arm. "For Christ's sake *don't*! You bet your bloody life it's a booby-trap!"

"We shall fall on to bayonets stuck upright *on* purpose, and spike our bloody selves through the bowels!"

"No!" chimed in a third. "Let's die out here decently like gents."

The pattern of the bombs—two North—two South; two East—two West—dropped to the second with the precision of clock-work—was steadily encroaching, confining us within an ever-diminishing circle. Unless I could hit upon some expedient, the end could not be far off now. The baboons up there were having a grand time.

"I'll risk it," said I, "if I don't come back, you won't follow: that's all. If it is all right, I'll yell!"

The hole was narrow. Fortunately I have "hips like a snake", and could just let myself down through it. I let myself go to the full extent of my arms, and hung there in the blackness, swinging my legs. I encountered no obstacle, but *anything* might be there, just below my feet! I realised what must be the sensations of a man about to be hanged, with the drop ready to open beneath him. Yet the criminal's death will be comparatively merciful; but to be impaled upon an upturned bayonet! Better not let my imagination wander, but close my eyes and drop blindly. I summoned up all my courage. Now for it! I picked myself up uninjured. I had fallen but a yard. I struck a match. We were saved. I bellowed to my companions to join me. I found myself in a cellar which had been fitted up as a cottage living-room.

Then that pile of red brick I had noticed outside amongst the bushes, must be all that remained of a house. The former inhabitants had contrived a fireplace down here; and there was a plank mantelpiece with absurd china ornaments. I also discovered a stump of candle which I lit. My companions were still hanging back.

"Come down!" I cried excitedly. "It's *grand* here!"

All agreed that I had saved the situation. We had vanished literally into the ground. It was not the oafs above us who had the last laugh. Shortly after this piece of reconnaissance work, for we reached our destination, and I made my report upon it, I was sent down to Rouen, to bring a party of Second Lieutenants and Non-coms up to Mouscron. Instead of reporting to some recognised military mess, as I suppose I should have done, I sought till I found a café which looked good.

"I want *déjeuner*," said I.

"I am not allowed to serve officers, but come in," said mine host, "upstairs they will not think of looking."

There is no "little girl" in this sordidly masculine story. I just felt the need of a gargantuan lunch! He served me with two sherries, and a potato and leek soup to follow, which proved at once excellent and substantial. A whole chicken followed, cooked to a turn and served with a dressed salad; a course which I washed down with a bottle of Château Margot of a good year, and in perfect condition. Then came Camembert *ad lib* and long rolls of newly-baked French bread, and farmhouse butter. Black coffee to top up with, of course; and a couple of glasses of Calvados: barbaric, if you will, but appropriately full of local colour, and as full of the sun's fire as though it had been distilled by means of a burning-glass! It was W. B. Yeats, I remember, who declared that poets need these two things: solitude and multitude. I had been stewing in the company of my fellows, and I craved this one thing only: to invite myself to meet myself at lunch, and keep the appointment. I was not even sleepy after this snack; I was in the infantry.

I contacted my party at the hour arranged, and we returned to Mouscron. From Mouscron the East-and-Wests migrated to Bondu, but the latter was a mere village, and when in due course the former was put out of bounds to troops—owing to the quantity of delayed-action bombs which the Huns had concealed there before they left—many of us paid it still surreptitious visits. As Orderly Officer, it came to my turn to go the rounds, ascertain that everything which had to do with the men was in order, and report to the Adjutant, "Battalion present, Sir!"

On one occasion, I couldn't find the Adjutant to whom to make my report, and decided to steal away to Mouscron, and return to look for him again, after listening to a few songs at some

café concert, if anything of the kind were obtainable. "Out of bounds to troops?" Well, it was a hundred to one against anybody recognising me. I discovered a café which promised well, for music emanated from an inner room. As I pushed open the door at the back, these singular words caught my ear: "Now then, fat Anna, *your* turn at the piano!"

I found myself in the presence of the Adjutant and almost all the younger officers. Sarcastic; bluffing, the Adjutant cried, "Don't you know this town is out of bounds? Why have you come?"

"I've come," said I, "to report, '*Battalion present!*'"

On one subsequent occasion, I left Bondu for Mouscron, when, impelled by a sudden yearning for civilisation, I determined to get a decent shave at a decent shop. The barber stropped his razor, and applied the lather. He was now shaving me, and had the naked blade against my cheek. Whilst he was in this posture, with a shattering roar, a shell worked by a delayed-action fuse blew up in the market square upon which the shop faced, and sent the whole plate-glass window in upon us! By miracle, I was neither cut nor scratched! But the window had shattered into a thousand pieces. The barber leaped into the air! We heard later that three English engineers and six returning civilians were killed.

"You might have cut my throat!" said I.

"It would have been without wishing to," said the barber. With that, he went into the inner shop, and returned with four postage stamps, which he proffered me with a trembling hand.

"You see, Monsieur, they are all printed with the word, *Belgien*: the name the Boches gave Belgium when they regarded it already as a permanent German colony. It never will be a German colony, and there never will be another issue of these stamps. There will be many fakes made to take in collectors, but these which I give you are genuine. Nobody has had time to think of faking *yet*."

We left Bondu for Dottignies, an industrial town of moderate size, where the platoon were billeted in a handsome château. The men were accommodated, for security, in the cellars; a Second Lieutenant and I in one of the bedchambers several floors up. One wing of this handsome building had been already demolished by shell-fire. Shells came over every night, but as the Hun is a creature of routine, their gunners sent invariably ten,

one after another, and then ceased until they sent us the next consignment of ten, and so forth. This was less of a strain upon the nerves than if they had loosed them off in varying quantities. One counted, and, so soon as the total had been reached, was free to sleep until they took it into their heads to resume their pestilential attentions.

One of these series of ten came uncomfortably close. Shell number eight burst in the street just before the front door. Number nine exploded in a greenhouse which had been built as a lean-to against the garden frontage of the château, sending splinters of broken glass by the thousand in every direction. Number ten, and last, blew away the balcony upon which our bedroom windows opened. We thought, my colleague and I, that the roof was falling, and with two twists of the body, were under the bed, whilst most of the ceiling fell on to it. But ours was the *lenis somnus agrestium*. We satisfied ourselves that the floor was solid, or reasonably so, and as there was no parlour-maid to remake the bed, we rolled ourselves up and slumbered once more in a mixture of laths, plaster, and bedding.

A good deal of looting was taking place in the town, in an unostentatious and Autolycus-like manner. Two Scotsmen received the soubriquet of the "Furniture-removers": but this was the libel of some wit. There is a difference between looting and flat robbery which it may be well to emphasise. It is this. A burglar takes what, but for him, will never be touched. A soldier takes what, if he leave it, will assuredly be taken by another. "As somebody is bound to take it," so he will reason, "why should not that somebody be me?"

An entire wing of this château where we were now billeted was, as has been said, already demolished by shelling. It appeared probable that the remainder of the building would follow in due course. And *then* every object which it contained would be annihilated. In a wardrobe I discovered a charming dress for a child. The colour was a fresh and pretty green, and it had a collar of exquisite Brussels lace. I thought it would make a capital present for my small daughter, and told Cox to pack it with my kit.

"And I," murmured my henchman, "should like to take the concertina. Perhaps they'll let me play it at smoking concerts."

It may have been an hour after this incident, when a motor-cyclist brought me a dispatch.

"You are appointed Town Major of Dottignies, as from" (date) "with special instructions to put down looting."

"Cox," said I, "listen to this!" I read my instructions. "Take that child's dress out of my kit!"

"Yes, Sir. . . . And the concertina?"

"Good God, Cox, you don't mean to say that you have taken a concertina! Give it up at once, or I'm afraid I'll have to have you shot!"

Cox grinned and bade farewell to his musical ambitions. When at home once more, I told my wife about the child's dress.

"What a horrible idea," she cried. "It could only have brought her bad luck!"

So I had lost nothing by prompt compliance with orders.

As nobody in his senses will look at Mars if Venus stand beside him, I will diversify this account of the follow-up, by two more reminiscences of leaves. They shall be a *Penseroso* and an *Allegro*; for if the first have in it not a little of the *macabre*, the second shall smell sweet as roses, and be light as foam flung from the dolphin's tail on a very clear day. . . .

She was twenty-two, and wore no make-up, except for the lips; but they were red as poppies, and in marked contrast with her almost too pale cheeks. Her features were exceptionally regular. She told me that she was an art student, but I suspect that she studied men at least as much as the works of Sargent or John. She affected no singularity in dress to arrest the attention, unless it were the long cigarette-holder of sapphire blue. She had "money enough of her own", she told me, "to live in reasonable security and independence".

I took her to dine at one of those "little places" which one thinks will be cheap: only to regret afterwards that one didn't rough it at the Ritz.

"But this"—with an air of ineffable disdain—"is a *carafe* wine, Sir!"

"It should be excellent, and it is the wine I'm ordering."

The Machiavellian race of waiters have at their finger-tips the technique of making the payer of the dinner appear mean before the girl he is treating. Well do they know, these sons of guile, that one must not argue with heat in the presence of the opposite sex, but maintain at least the mask of suavity: and they exploit the situation.

Her flat was on the third floor of a dignified Regency house

which had been converted. The french windows of her bedroom came down to within a foot or two of the floor. One looked through them across her street, down another which crossed it at right angles, and into a square with iron rails, and patches of lamp-lit foliage in a patter of rain. It was dominated by some spectral paladin in dripping bronze, bestriding a hazy horse. The wind was blowing in great gusts, and a splash of rain struck me full in the face. It was pleasanter indoors, with the firelight and the colours, and the long curtains with the Cupids and blue garlands woven into their design.

I closed the high glass doors, and shut out the night. Towards morning, she looked at me with a smile merry, comfortable, and trustful, and, in the act of smiling, fell asleep. She looked no whit less sculpturesque at this moment of suspended animation. Her nose appeared as well-chiselled as ever, but fuller, and more inclining to sensuality which, if it be not in excess, I do not consider a defect. Her lips seemed fuller likewise. She had obviously narrowed them with lip-stick, in order to heighten that classic appearance of hers with art. Yes, that something of the statuesque about her was still there, and notably enhanced by the pallor of her cheeks. She wore *not* pyjamas, but a silk nightdress: and this too was what one would expect.

At the time of which I am writing, pyjamas were almost exclusively masculine wear. One associated them with men. And therefore coquettes had begun to affect them, to captivate the male eye with that garment's agreeable insistence upon contours foreign and captivating. There was no lace about this girl's night attire: just an open collar with a plainly worked hem. She might pass for the embodiment of Hellenic simplicity as she lay there marbly; motionless; a sleeping nymph of antiquity, in a modern setting.

Somewhere behind my head, I had observed a switch. Without taking my eyes from her, I felt behind my head, found it, and switched off the light. The tall french windows with their glass panels had come open again. The wind was blowing with violence. Let it! I was too sleepy to get out of bed and lock them. The last sound I heard as I sank into slumber was the flap-flap-flap of the long curtains billowing out and falling, and billowing out once more into the room. . . .

It was a dream. I was lying at full length on an exposed promontory, twisting my fingers into the scanty grass in a frenzied effort to prevent the hurricane from sweeping me down the

slope to the edge of the precipice where, if it carried me farther, it must dash me to pieces upon the rocks below. Furious blast followed furious blast, lashing the billows to frenzy, till all was whiteness and blackness, and flakes of foam tossed in every direction by the winds.

A great ship had struck on sunken rocks near shore, and was going to pieces. The crew climbed higher, higher, clinging to the shrouds, but each successive roller as it engulfed them, carried some away. An ugly dream. I shook myself free from it. "And now," thought I, "I am waking." For a few moments, the moon shone out steadily, her light unchecked by the scurrying clouds. My companion was sitting bolt upright in bed, watching me intently, and yet—how shall I put it?—with *unseeing* eyes.

Never in my life have I experienced a sensation so uncanny: to be *stared* at, to be *studied* at close quarters, yet not apparently to be perceived! It was as though, during sleep, I had become invisible. For a matter of minutes she continued her scrutiny. Then she rose deliberately, and with a steady tread, stalked to the french windows. A violent gust of wind—no dream-gale this time—came bucketing into the room, tossing the long curtains like banners.

Out and inward they flew, and up they would be borne towards the ceiling; then they would sink; only to be tossed up once more, torn at their rings by the storm's violence. The moon had again withdrawn her light. Now she shone out again: to present me with a frightful picture! There was a drop of at least fifty feet to the pavement below, and there the girl stood just *outside* the room, her naked feet upon the window-sill! A step: half a step: and that would be the end. Nor was this all, though this was much. She was talking all this while, with someone whom she obviously thought she saw *outside* the window, yet upon the *same level* as herself.

Had it been possible for me to catch one syllable of what she was saying, I might have had a clue to the situation, but that nerve-racking *flap-flap-flap* of the curtains drowned every word. I must do something, and at once! But *what*? Slip from bed, creep up from behind, and seize, and carry her back to safety? Yes! But might I not startle her? Might not my slightest movement, by terrifying, precipitate her over the ledge? And then? "They'll think I've murdered her!" thought I.

I attempted to reassure myself. "Absurd," I told myself,

"I'm still dreaming. All this will turn out to be a continuation of the shipwreck!" But this vision proved impossible to shatter by pinching. I *was* awake then! Pitch-darkness followed moonlight, and moonlight pitch-darkness, in rapid, irregular fluctuations, and it was only in such glimpses as the scurrying clouds permitted, that I could see her at all. But I still heard her muttering, communing with that somebody who, if he or she had any but a dream existence, must be standing on air, at fifty feet from the ground!

In the fugitive gleams of spectral light, I saw her profile plainly: her ashen cheeks, the rapid movement of her lips in hurried speech. Was I to witness her suicide? This delirium of hers might well be the prelude to self-slaughter! And there she stood—how beautiful, how strange a figure!—with here London, and *there*—eternity. The wind drove the rain against her, and revealed the perfect moulding of her breasts beneath the saturated silk. Her skirts billowed out behind her, leaving her legs bare.

A cloud shrouded the moon once more, and even as I roused myself silently up to an attempt to rescue her, the thinning rag of mist dissolved again. I saw her clearly. From passivity, her features had become horribly convulsed. This time she raised her voice sufficiently for me to catch the words:

"The wind and rain are beating upon my mother's grave; and she's trying to get in, but she can't!" Heavens! The girl was stretching out her arms to this figment of her imagination. Were she to lose her balance, even for an instant, she must be dashed to pieces, and I be suspected for her murderer! To such a preternaturally high-strung state had her madness wrought me that, by sheer force of suggestion, it seemed to me that I did, for a moment, see the girl's mother there at the window, a florid-cheeked woman as unlike the daughter as might be, in rusty black! Odd how a thought—a dream—can be induced!

"And she can't get in!" the girl was wailing, "she can't get in!"

Was she a somnambulist? Why had it not occurred to me before? I had heard that sleep-walkers respond to suggestion. And so, in curt, almost menacing, tones, I said: "Well, if she can't, she *can't*. You come back to bed!"

The effect of my prosaic brutality was remarkable. The convulsive look vanished. Another train of thought or feeling

had taken possession of her. She turned round and stepped down from the window-ledge and—thank God!—on the near side of it! I raised my bare hand to my forehead, and wiped away the sweat. I returned to bed. My strange companion now turned upon me again that stony stare—that describes it—it was as though the pupils of her eyes had been turned to stones—and came slowly towards me as though entranced, with measured, deliberate tread. The bedroom was large. She had a long way to come. Horror of horrors! What was she holding? For in another of these moon-glimpses, I beheld the flash of metal, and that she had raised her hand with the transparent intention of striking.

Was she a homicidal maniac with the blood-lust upon her? And now, as she drew slowly nearer, she passed from the window into the shadows. And still she approached! I heard now, but could see nothing, and yet, though I could no longer see, but only divine her features, I would take my oath that she never once removed her eyes from my face. I *felt* that stony stare. It was a thing you could feel!

Flap-flap went the curtains. I drew the bolster towards me. It was thick. I would take the thrust of her knife in that! And now—the electric light! What had possessed me all this time that I had not thought of it? Still holding the bolster with my left hand, to break the blow when it should fall, I fumbled behind me with my right. My hands encountered the switch, and light flooded the room!

Farcical anticlimax! She had twisted her waist belt about her hand, and so held it now in her clenched fist that the silver buckle thrust out beyond it. But she *believed* that she was holding a weapon—a fool might know it!—there was no mistaking the threat implicit in that gesture. And even a buckle may blind, if used by a maniac with intent to kill! The light sobered but did not wake her. Over my legs she climbed, soaking nightdress and all, and settled herself comfortably in, as wet as though she had been fished from a pond. She laid her head upon the pillow, and was immediately in normal sleep again.

Phew! What a night. I got up and closed the french windows. She must have opened them, for I had shut them when we turned in. A second door led into the bathroom. Here also the window was open. This had intensified the draught. This too I closed. Beginning to feel chilly, I got back into bed, and fell once more to studying my partner's face. A hint of colour

had crept into her cheeks. Then suddenly she woke, with that identical half-smile—merry, and trustful, and wholly comfortable—which she had worn when first she fell asleep at my side.

“I think I must have been dreaming. You didn’t notice anything?”

“No!” said I.

What *does* one say on these occasions?

CHAPTER XIII

TOWN MAJOR

WHEN I was due to return to my unit from Paris leave, Bobby came to see me off. I had met her at the roller-skating rink, the *Bal Tabarin*, where she had introduced herself to me without formality.

"Don't be so demonstrative, Bobby! I'm here with a friend."

"I have seen her. I suppose she won't scratch my eyes out?"

Bobby was employed in the beauty culture establishment which I shall call *Beauté Eblouissante*, and she was as good an advertisement for the place as could have been found. Her friend, the Doctor, was away at some field-hospital, patching up the anatomies of such poor devils as had become unstuck whilst engaged in heroic warfare. That her protector was a man of taste was obvious no less from his furnishing of her apartment, than from his selection of herself as his companion, for she was blonde, passionate, vivacious, slender, witty, and white.

Her flat was hung with yellow silk, even to the tester and bed-curtains, for she fancied herself in this setting. It was as though one had stepped into the world of Fragonard or Watteau. Gilt chairs, the ottoman: all, she informed me, were in the *style Louis Quinze*. I bought her roses, not a commonplace bouquet, but whole armfuls, cheapening the bargain shamelessly, as I had been compelled to with fowls when making my purchases as Mess President. Together we arranged them, I placing them as she directed, until her room resembled for brightness, a poetical Arcadia.

Her Doctor must have been a remarkable man, philosopher no less than aesthete, for in addition to the flat, he had left her in possession of the keys of the cellar, though he can hardly have supposed that his Bobby would drink alone in wartime. I pictured him as a perfectly civilised man, and a good citizen to boot. At another time I should have been pleased to make his acquaintance. But not now. I was glad he didn't call: *pinguior domus sine domino*.

Bobby produced three bottles of champagne, and insisted upon my opening them then and there, despite my protests that we should deaden the sparkle.

"Now don't you suggest paying for anything. I know exactly what your pay is, as an English lieutenant! Besides, you gave me the roses!"

A day apart; a day of laughter, kisses, blossoms, and wine! A day when no harsh note was struck: the perfect intermezzo.— "Now beholding the life of man and perceiving it to be full of sorrow, Zeus sent to him Aphrodite; and Dionysus to be his lord at feasts." In the thick of the "'14-'18", that conflict of mud and blood, I had known complete remission from life's harsher realities. I had not even known mental strife. I had attempted to solve no intellectual problem. I had reached out after no thought which did not surrender itself without my seeking. I had lived, upon the beautiful and too much neglected surface of things, hours light as foam, flung high by the dolphin's tail into the clearest air.

Bobby came with me to the station, for a parting farewell. I was not alone in this. Almost every English soldier on the platform appeared to have relations in Paris. Except that one door was missing, my first-class compartment looked comfortable enough. A few coal-trucks formed units of this singular train, and of one of these last, almost an entire side was missing. In this truck, some of the soldiers had made up a grand fire in a perforated bucket, and one of the crew was toasting a fish at it on his bayonet. I recognised him, and he saluted.

"Don't set the train alight, or you'll broil more than just that fish!"

"Very good, Sir," said he, grinning; and added, "I'm looking forward to supper, Sir!"

It is of the essence of the soldier's life that he may be called upon to surrender it at a moment's notice, and one might suppose, from this circumstance, that an air of dejection, or at least of composure, must be a military characteristic. The reverse would seem to be true. Explain the paradox how you will, one sees happier faces in the "valley of the shadow of death", than one does in Bond Street. I speak of the average private of the citizen army, but this is true also of the professional soldier who fights because he wants to; and of the disciplined adventurer.

"Your motto might be, 'It's an ill war that blows nobody good'!"

Captain F—— turned on me his Mephistophelian smile.

"There are many worse things," said he, "than a *good war*!"

Heaven forbid that I should endorse his view, but seeing that he has three body wounds, a groove in the calf of his left leg which might have been chiselled by a carpenter's gouge, and his right eye missing owing to a gunshot wound, I cannot briefly dismiss his dictum as academic.

I have many recollections from my brief spell of work as Town Major of Dottignies. One shall be grim, but I will follow this by another which shall be the reverse, for the sake of the different slants they offer upon human life. I was compiling a billeting list of the suburbs. You know the sort of thing? Number 1, Rue de la So-and-So; billeting for two men. Nos. 2, 3; nothing. Number 4; two men. Number 8; good cellar; will serve for shelter. Number 9; garage for one car.

In due course I came to a door where I knocked, but obtained no answer. People were indoors, for I could hear talking. I became peremptory. I hammered at the door. It opened, and out they brought a child's coffin. This was followed by a train of weeping women. I saluted reverently and stood aside. Later, when I spied an opportunity of doing so decently, I asked one of the mourners for particulars.

"Was it a little boy?"

"A little girl."

"Was she killed by a shell?"

"No," came the weary answer, "only died of fright."

Now for the other reminiscence. A shell had smashed a telegraph pole, cutting it clean through. Down came the top of the post, and the mass of wires still attached to it hung oscillating at about a yard from the ground. Two small boys and three girls caught sight of the wreckage, and raced towards it. In a moment they were enjoying an improvised swing! The three girls, with their arms about one another's tiny waists, were sitting; the two small boys were pushing, and all five were laughing, as though the one object of the war had been to provide them with this enchanting new toy! Warming to their work, the small boys threw off their coats. The little girls' feet flew skywards! "Never," thought I, "were children happier since Time began!"

A ludicrous incident now; one of many. I was sitting in my office. It was an ex-butcher's shop, and only the smell of gas seemed able to expel that of carrion. Cox entered and said, "A Colonel would like a word with you, Sir. He says he won't

dismount, but will speak with you at the window. He's just outside."

"Yes, Sir?"

"Eh?"

"Yes, Sir!"

"Can you stable a thousand horses?"

A tall order this, at a moment's notice! I take the plunge however.

"Certainly, Sir! When for?"

"Eh? Oh! Thanks very much!" He shook the reins, and away at the gallop! I loosed after him a diabolical bellow.

"When for, Sir!"

He turned about and smiled.

"Thanks!" he cried.

He was a gunner, and deaf. Fortunately the horses never turned up.

Besides the billeting of troops, my orders were to find temporary quarters for returning civilians, when my rhetoric was insufficient to persuade them to remain beyond the danger zone. Ninety per cent of the arrivals were men venturing on in advance, to ascertain whether the town were yet habitable for wives and children.

I only spoke with one woman who had remained in Dottignies during its occupation by the Huns: an aged crone of sovereign and incomparable ugliness. I had ventured into her shop to buy a pair of socks. Trembling oddly, she passed them to me over the counter.

"How much?" I asked her.

"Are you going to pay?"

"Why, Madame, yes! This *is* a shop surely?"

She rolled frightened eyes at me: "My last customer was a *Boche, Monsieur*, a corporal. He simply pulled out a revolver, thrust the muzzle into my breast, and roared in German, 'Socks, you!' I was frightened, *Monsieur, voyez-vous*, when I saw you come in!" When I assured her that I had no intention of not paying, she could hardly find words in which to express her gratitude.

She insisted upon my taking a keepsake of the occasion, a German tobacco-box, with its synthetic contents. These apparently were dried beech-leaves which had been mechanically subjected to high pressure, together with the admixture of a trifle of real tobacco. Just sufficient genuine tobacco had been employed to impart to the dried leaves a very faint

suspicion of a flavour of nicotine. Impelled by curiosity, I smoked a pipeful. It gave me a sore throat for a week. The picture on the lid showed a family group of goblins smoking. Happy symbolism, had I had the wit to read it aright! The artist implied that the mixture was not for human consumption!

The only billets in Dottignies which offered any reasonable measure of security were the huge basements of the factories. Of these there were many, but before their departure, the Huns had taken the precaution of filling them with water and destroying the pumps. I was compelled therefore to explore the outermost ring of the suburbs, in my quest for depth plus drought.

In the course of my labours, I made the acquaintance of a citizen of Dottignies whose hobby, it appeared, was *monks*. I am but a tempered enthusiast for the monkish ideal: but this gentleman possessed a cellar! Drinks were hard to come by, and I was willing to discuss even celibacy over a bottle. When the Huns entered Dottignies, my new acquaintance very wisely took wing, but not before he had sealed his bottles with scrupulous care, as a precaution against damp, and buried them, like the body of the great Sir John Moore, "darkly, at dead of night".

"The damp," he complained, "has ruined the labels, and I never know what I am going to drink, until I am actually sampling the contents. Moisture has affected the contents in a very few cases; by no means in all."

He would call at my office, and invite me to visit him. I had no means of requiting his hospitality, but it was obvious that he expected nothing.

"My wife is away," my visitor would say, "and my children; it is *so* lonely!"

I would give Cox orders to notify me immediately were I wanted; but this rarely happened after dinner: tinned rations only. Lord! how sick one got of bully beef! Cox was absolutely reliable, so I did not hesitate to place trust in him, and he was as sterling, as he was shrewd.

Ensconced in two arm-chairs, it would be: *Santé, Monsieur!*

Bonne santé, Monsieur! "Ah! It is Madeira to-night." And then monk-talk would begin. "Tell me, by the way, *Monsieur*, did you see the monks from hereabouts when they arrived, poor refugees, at Victoria Station in London? I am told they were hospitably received?"

What was I to say? Devil a monk did I know! And had half my family been monks, I still had to guess what order of monks

these were whom he referred to, and as they loomed so large on his mental canvas, I did not like to profess my entire ignorance of everything that had to do with them! Still, my sympathy gave him great pleasure: and there was no wine-shop open as yet in Dottignies!

"At Victoria, you said? Ah! *Monsieur*, yes! They were welcome indeed."

"Really? May I think that you showed yourselves glad to receive them?"

"*Glad?*" But, *Monsieur*, it was an ovation!"

It is astonishing how I brightened him up.

"Ah! the good monks," said he, "the *dear* Fathers! Our loss, but your gain. They are no runners after women: no wine-bibbers"—he cast a wistful eye towards the rose-bed, and set out not with a corkscrew but a spade!—"They are no wine-bibbers, the good monks. Come! We shall try our luck again!"

And as the second bottle drew to its ruby close, I began half to fancy that I had myself met the "dear Fathers" at Victoria, had escorted them with triumph to the Guildhall, and had there feasted them, with more than Roman splendour.

Although Dottignies was at some distance from the line, yet shells came over at frequent intervals, killing horses for whose carcasses the butchers quarrelled; and gas for variety; so that I never regarded it as an engaging resort. My bedroom at the top of the house, in the basement of which the family slept, was the dirtiest I had ever slept in, or, for that matter, ever seen. Dirt from the boots of all those men who had occupied this billet before, lay untouched upon the floor, so thickly as to resemble a fine layer of soil, and completely conceal the planking! To add to the discomfort, the chamber-pot—the only one my landlady could ever come by for this room—was a *cardboard-box*, and that in an advanced state of putrefaction! Fires were, of course, luxuries unknown; one was always wet. Scabies—that foul ally of dirt—had acquired such a grip upon me that from heel to neck I was as red as though I had been painted. A cough began more and more to harry me, and I became increasingly conscious of heart trouble.

I was not sorry, therefore, when I received orders to report to Millaim, for a course of instruction in map-reading and map-making, in the composition of messages for pigeons and humans, with other matters; but which was, in effect, "cushy". Although Millaim was situated in pastoral country of ideal beauty, one

could not regard it as country, because all the associations were wrong. One could never forget the war: as how indeed should one expect to? After a morning's drilling, we officers would march out for sight-ranging, and halt upon a grassy knoll, beneath a sky of laughing blue, interspersed with scurrying clouds. No time for reverie: and yet——

Forsaking their loved Olympus, the naked Nymphs and Graces link hands here in the love-awakening dance! In this green corner of the world, at every shifting of the clover-scented breeze, the soul is surprised unawares with strains of ravishing music, for here, outstretched upon the purple thyme, Dionysus breathes a soul into the pipe of seven reeds. His prick-eared troupe of Satyrs cluster about him, with certain of the flower-faced Nymphs. Lost in his own melody, the Master plays on entranced. A chaplet of vine-leaves and ivy-buds binds in his flowing locks. There is Heaven in his darkly-shining eyes.

I never heard Dionysus playing, but plenty of this sort of thing: our instructor was Scotch.

"Five fingers rright: base single poplar: eleven o'clock: what distance?"

"Two and three-quarter kilometres!"

"Two and a quarter at most, I fancy"—"fancy", *quotha*, as though he had not paced it out!—"Here, tak' the glasses!"

And yet how excessively pleasing it was once again to see country which was neither blasted by shell-fire, nor discoloured by gas! Above all, after the filth and squalor of Dottignies! And how utterly unspoilt by any suggestion of urbanisation the land hereabouts was! A girl at her cottage door used always to smile, as we marched by for map-reading; not a "come hither" smile, but a vacant grin of rustic wonder.

"*Mademoiselle*, why do you always laugh when we go by?"

"Because, *Monsieur*, you are so different from the troops we had here last!"

"And who were they, *Mademoiselle*?"

"*Les Chinois, Monsieur!*"—We were rural as all that! The course we were on was, in effect, intended to allow those upon it, a short while in which to recuperate from strain. There were few of us there who were really fit men. Standing beneath the hot shower in the glorious baths installation, a Scot broke silence.

"This," said he, "breaks the creatures' hearts!"

There was an immoderate run upon the "M.O's" supply of sulphur ointment; intended more particularly for destroying such

pigmies of the brute creation as had found their way in under the human skin! There were also laundries which employed, one must suppose, boiling water and antiseptics at least equally with soap! Tempers were worse than they had been in the front line; naturally, for the strain being removed, we were not all ready for the sudden semi-relaxation.

One evening after mess, we had what is called a "Subaltern's Court Martial"; that is, a mock trial. The martyr in this case was a young and exceedingly unassuming Second Lieutenant, against whom nothing worse could be discovered than that he possessed education and breeding. He was marched into the mess hut in pyjamas, to be baited by the less educated, and the less well bred; by those victims of arrested intelligence in whom the spirit of the school bully had survived into manhood.

"Bring in the prisoner! Halt! Mark time!"

You see the picture? The smallish fellow in the middle, between the two tall louts, the "escort"? Upon the orders "Mark Time!" the clod to the rear kicks the "prisoner" with his knees each time he raises them; whilst the oaf in front brings down the heels of his heavy boots upon the victim's naked toes. Humour for Huns, which should be left to them. The unfortunate is compelled to stand in undignified attitudes, to recite ridiculous verses, and generally to perform a thousand mortifying antics, to gratify the malice of the human orang-outang.

At my table at dinner, in this mess which was made up of elements from a score of different contingents, sat a Second Lieutenant who, since I had never exchanged so much as a word with him, could have no matter of grievance against me. In the course of the mock trial we were witnessing, I myself with disgust, this fellow astonished me by saying to me, unprovoked by word or gesture of mine, "*You're* going through it next! We're getting up a gang against you!"

I looked at him. He was large of build, but puffy and gross. His hair glittered with oil. I set him down in my mind, as one who had been in peace-time, a provincial butcher, or butcher's assistant.

"Going through *what*?" I demanded with contempt.

"Huh! huh!" he sniggered, "a Subaltern's Court Martial!"

"If so, I shall shoot you!" said I.

He roared with laughter, as did also those of his friends to whom he repeated my reply. So soon as I could do so without exciting remark, I left the mess hut, and hurried to the Nissen

hut where we slept and which, at this hour, as I had anticipated, I found empty. We were sleeping eight to a hut, and I now recalled that my enemy was one of this number. As a very recent arrival, I had not yet got to know everybody.

I hid my revolver in two pairs of socks, and deposited it in a dark corner under my bed; I had noticed that the fatigues were not over-scrupulous in the matter of brooming. The sleeping-hut was long, narrow, and had a bow-shaped roof of corrugated iron. Were one to map the hut, my bed would occupy the South-west, the butcher's, the North-west corner. I next put a few cartridges into every pocket of my week-day and church parade tunics and trousers. It occurred to me that those who were provoking me might abstract my ammunition, and I had no intention of being caught without the means of making good my words.

I am a light sleeper who wakes at all hours, so it was no inconvenience to me to slip quietly from bed at four in the morning, and make my way to the butcher's which I could very dimly discern in the greying light. "I'll shake him like a rat!" I had been saying to myself. I pulled his bed-clothes down sufficiently to allow of my getting a fast grip of him beneath his armpits, but shaking him was another matter. He was as heavy as so much wood. So I changed my plan, and hauled him into a sitting posture; then thrust him with violence down again upon his back.

"Are they attacking?" he roared.

No sleepers so profound as soldiers! In the hut nobody else stirred.

"Nobody's attacking," I told him, "but you seemed not to take seriously what I told you at dinner, about your getting me given a 'Subaltern's Court Martial'. You have time now to think the matter over undisturbed by the crowd. If either you, or your friends, attempt anything of the sort, I shall kill you immediately. Good night!"

He addressed not a word to me next day, and I, for my part, was unable to divine his thoughts. Day wore on. At mess, not a word. This night also, I repeated my tactics. I had ascertained, of course, that my gun was still where I had hidden it. I again advanced upon his bed in the small hours, obtained a firm grip upon him, hauled him up and flung him down again backwards, with all the strength of my body. He was as heavy as a hog, but I was in good training, despite gas and the cough; and I have very strong shoulders. I heaved and flung him in all directions,

till his head shook on his body, and his jaws rattled one against the other. Why he did not show fight, I cannot imagine.

"Don't forget," said I, in conclusion, "a 'Subaltern's Court Martial,' and I kill you. If you're going through with it, you haven't long to live. Consider whether it's worth it. Good night."

Next day, not a word, not a sign, not a gesture; and this third night, the same tactics on my part. The business was beginning to get on my nerves. I wanted to know definitely, one way or the other, whether he was determined to risk baiting me at the price I was determined he should pay for it, or not. I again got a fast grip upon him, and yet again I hauled and flung his hulking brawn this way and that, if possible with more violence than before.

"Isn't it ridiculous," I said, "that with only a few hours more to live, you should lie here snoring? If you're staging this stunt for to-morrow night, you have only one more breakfast to eat. Get up and enjoy yourself before you're dead!"

His collapse was complete. With evasive imbecility, he explained that he had been "only joking": a transparent lie! He added that he had "hoped that I wouldn't take it like this". *That* I could well believe.

Had I been driven to shooting him, I should have sought out the M.O. and said, "You are treating me for scabies, and I have an odd cough which I can't account for, and, I fancy, a slight but pretty permanent temperature. If you like to say that, owing to these disabilities, I am not perfectly master of my actions, there's nothing to stop you. I leave it entirely to you."

At the worst, it could have meant but a shooting squad or hanging, and at this *ultima Thule* in time, when the world war looked like enduring until the world's end, there was assuredly no exit that could not be met with philosophy.

From Millaim, I reported to Bondues, a village where my old battalion was established. I found here, and in the country about, a different atmosphere. Hun airmen were sending us from the clouds slim messages in English, Flemish, and French, bearing these words:

"Why are you fighting? The *armistice* is signed."

It was *not* signed, but this was the first time I had so much as heard the word pronounced; and it was good to hear it! These billets printed upon fluttering strips of tissue paper which flew like thistledown, showed manifestly that the German will to fight

was ebbing away. A peasant brought me the first, and I myself retrieved three: one from a bramble where it hung daintily like a seed, and bore like one, promise for the future.

The good folk of Bondues, I was to discover, regarded the Huns from a different angle to those at Dottignies and Mouscron. The girl at my billet, wept copiously for her departed Boche, and flared up when I told her it was unpatriotic to regret that an enemy had been chased from her native soil. She even regarded me—or was this fancy?—as a representative of the party which had helped to throw him out. Her mother also regretted the change.

“The German officers were far more considerate than the English. They used to put on fatigues to help us sweep and scrub, and did a lot to lighten all the extra work they caused. And they would come back to their billets after dinner and sing, and play the piano, and do everything to make things lively. English officers just sit by themselves after dinner, in their mess. And they have no use for a girl and never address a word to her until they’re drunk: and then it’s ‘*Cushey-voo*’ immediately!”

It was the old story. The true knights had routed the ravishers, and the damsels hadn’t wanted to be saved! But I can well imagine that the rank and file of the East-and-Wests, with their chapel upbringing, were extremely crude in love! As a witty lady I know observes, “The difference between a dog and a man in love, is that the dog shows more *poise*.” Although I was no romantic Boche, everything was done at my billet to make life agreeable.

With artless curiosity, my landlady and her daughter demanded my profession: “or was I always a soldier?”

“I am an author, *Mademoiselle*.”

“You write books? What sort of books?”

“Short stories, history, sketches and articles; but what I love best in the world is poetry.”

“*Maman! ce monsieur est dans la littérature!* This then will interest you, *Monsieur*. I am going to read you aloud something beautiful.”

And she took from a chest of drawers, reverently, as though it were the sole extant copy of some rare manuscript, a ballad which proved to have fifty verses or thereabouts, upon a lurid theme. Having dismembered his mistress, a young American concealed the pieces in a trunk. This he deposited in one of the

parcel offices at I forget which of the railway termini. The trunk was forced open, and proved to contain fragments which, when all fitted together, combined to form what had once been the person of a young Paris work-girl who was essentially chaste.

It was only her body, and not her soul, which she had contracted the habit of leasing out to her lover's wealthy business associates! This point the blunt-witted Othello failed to perceive. And so he had murdered her; and the Law stepped in dam' quick, and murdered *him*! It was a yellow pressman's account of a sordid murder, written in doggerel instead of journalese. Then with the same air of almost religious reverence which she had displayed when first she produced it, she returned the ballad to its drawer when, smiling upon me, she said with the air of one enunciating an incontrovertible truth: "*C'est beau parce que c'est vrai!*"

"Oh! that art were in truth as simple as this! And what are we artists to do when we realise that not Homer nor Shakespeare himself, however simply rendered into a modern idiom, could have made that little heart flutter more wildly, or have purged that artless soul more poignantly with the tragic emotions of pity and terror! That's the way to make money, Gentlemen of the Press; corpses in trunks! And lay the sentiment on with a trowel.

A few days after settling down into the billet, a motor cyclist wearing the badge of the *Premiers Grenadiers*, dismounted before my door, and handed me a message. What was toward? Was I to report back, and serve with them again? To share the "push" with my old friends and allies? Or had something gone wrong perhaps, for which they held me ultimately accountable? I cast my mind back but could recall nothing to the purpose: except perhaps that dreadful night of the *Kangaroos*!

The Baron had summoned me to his dug-out, and when I arrived, he passed me over a paper, demanding in a tone not devoid, or so I fancied, of moral indignation,

"*Qu'est que tout cela veut dire ? Des Kangaroos !*"

"But, *mon Commandant*, is it certain that you have no key to this code in your office here?" For the message read: "Zebras North-West: Kangaroos, South-East."

"We've no means of deciphering it whatever! If they sent a key at all, presumably it would have come by a second messenger. Obviously they wouldn't risk code and key both together with the same runner."

"And no one's come!"

"Devil a soul!"

"Would you like me, *mon Commandant*, to go to the East-and-
West, and explain the position? I——"

"No! It's a hundred to one chance against your getting
through, in this tornado. No! I've taken all my dispositions,
and I see nothing that I could alter for the better anywhere."

And that night passed like all the previous nights, and we,
like the Jackdaw after the Cardinal-Archbishop's curses, found
ourselves "not a penny the worse" for being unable to distin-
guish between a Zebra and a Kangaroo! But the motor-cyclist
of the *Premiers Grenadiers* was awaiting his answer, so I read the
message without more ado. It was most reassuring. It ran:

Ce 7 Septembre 1918.

Cher Monsieur,

*Nous serons enchantés de vous avoir à déjeuner à notre Mess demain
à 13 heures*—and after instructions as to the route I should
find best to follow it concluded—*Merci mille fois et à demain.*

It was in the handwriting and bore the signature of my former
Commandant, the Baron; and I was profoundly touched by the
thought that after a month's absence—and that diversified for
him by all the distracting chances of the "Salient"—he should
still care to single me out to do me a courtesy.

I was shown not into the little bathing-machine of a hut
where I had dined formerly with just the Commandant of the
moment, and his Adjutant, but in a comparatively spacious
affair, and the other officers of his command were also present.
He gave me the place of honour, as his guest, at the table at his
right, and a bottle of superlative Burgundy—that drink for the
Gods!—was set before me. He told me that he had specially
despatched a motor-cyclist to obtain it for me, from a town
many miles from the front.

One of the many things which delighted me about these men
was their ability to talk about all manner of subjects, which had
nothing to do with their professional calling as soldiers. The
officers I had known of my father's generation had been sterling
men, but standoffish with strangers, as not belonging to their
caste, and able to talk about nothing very much beyond India
and sport. One could hardly conceive of an officer of the old
school, in England, talking of books, or of an exhibition of
pictures, of music, or of any branch of science; it would have
been set down promptly as rank bad form, don't you know!

But I daresay all this has changed, and if so, the change will be for the better. It was a narrow convention.

The conversation now chanced to turn upon prehistoric monsters; the Mess treating these creatures humorously rather than scientifically. The Baron alone possessed solid knowledge of the subject, though he spoke no less entertainingly about them than the others. But every now and again, with an: "*Excusez, Messieurs*", he would leave us, to return a few moments later, and resume the conversation at the point where he had left it off. He was one of those men who can give their undivided attention now to this matter, now to that, without confusion of thought; concentrating fixedly upon each point in turn.

During his brief absences from table, he was putting his finishing touches to the scheme a fighting patrol was even then to carry out, and giving last minute instructions. In due course, the expedition set forwards. It met with success, and we had hardly risen from *déjeuner* before fifty German prisoners were marched in. Shortly after this delightful lunch, amidst the most congenial company, came another no less agreeable though of a totally different type.

My contingent had been temporarily removed to a village called, if I remember right, Houle, for the purpose, amongst other things, of a grand parade before Lord Plumer; for by this time the Armistice, if not signed, was regarded as a matter of certainty. When the formalities were over, whom should I run against but my younger brother, Adrian, an encounter the more astonishing as, I think, neither of us had any idea that the other was in Belgium. When last I had heard of him, he had been at Arras.

We each obtained a few hours' leave and proposed to celebrate the occasion with a grand lunch at the "local". This hostelry had been christened *La Réunion De Bons Amis*. Deciding that this was too pompous, Adrian observed, "I shall translate that, '*The Farmer's Arms*'." It was pleasant for a brief while to leave the atmosphere of the Mess, and resume family contacts. "What's So-and-So doing; and where is So-and-So?" Such talk could not possibly interest a reader, but it has its very human side, and there are times when one would not exchange it for the wit of Sheridan.

The landlady produced a capital soup, and an omelette, not forgetting that *sine qua non* of all civilised reunions, a bottle of the best. The fact that Adrian had been recommended for his

M.C. gave further occasion for "propitiating", as our grand-fathers loved to express it, the "rosy God". When time was expiring, and we were due to quit the board to return to our respective units, we invited our hostess to drink a glass with us, when according to custom, she demanded, "Had we enjoyed our meal?" To this, with a bold incursion into Pauline French, Adrian replied, "*Nous sommes maintenant plus fort que les lions!*" A poetical declaration which the landlady greeted, not with the Gallic smile, but a most Falstaffian shout of laughter.

But the gas was working me harm all this time, and that, I suppose, and the long marches, were combining to give me a disorderly action of the heart. I began for the first time in my life, since early childhood, to suffer from fits of depression. Cox, my *fidus Achates*, was away on leave, and I was back again at Bondues, with a temporary batman, who was no less proficient in his job. Once he presented me with a sheet of note-paper saying:

"This must be yours, Sir. I found the wind blowing it along the floor. I hope you don't mind my admitting that I read it? A sonnet, Sir; and, if I may say so, an uncommonly fine one!"

"Good Lord! Thanks! How do you come to know that it's a sonnet? I mean, not one man in a hundred recognises verse forms, and of those who can, very few indeed can tell what is poetry and what isn't; except that they almost invariably prefer the rubbish!"

"Well, Sir, I am an artist too. In peace time, I play a cornet in the Hippodrome band."

As illustrating my mood at the moment, it will be to the point to print the sonnet in this place.

IT VER: IT VENUS

Farewell to your bright heads these golds adorn,
 These reds, with paeon of colour laughing low
 I' th' thick bronze: to your sheeny breasts that show
 Through silk or tissue; to our loves new born
 To fierce or drowsy rapture when with morn
 We kist how often! Cold Time wills it so
 To whom no altar stands, nor pale lamps' glow
 Is grateful, neither fruit, nor flower, nor corn
 By shy hand proffered; nor the sacred, white,
 Aspiring incense. The red rose is hoar,
 Time, at thy step: and lo! beyond recall,
 Youth flies, the springtime flies, and youth's delight
 Like the wing'd thistle, and to me no more
 The laughing Aphrodite throws the ball!

I was already in truth a case for hospital, but just as a man who is financially unsound can keep going awhile by drawing upon capital, so a young man can draw and even overdraw on that vanishing commodity his youth. Upon the famous 11th of November 1918, the Armistice was signed.

"Don't you know the Armistice has been signed?" Captain Pinchbeck asked me, at half-past ten that morning.

"Rather! I should just think I do. They're dragging pianos out of private houses, and playing them in the streets over there at Mouscron!"

"You *know* Armistice has been signed. Then *why*—hic!—aren't you drunk?"

To this question I could find no reply. His moral indignation disarmed me.

On the 19th of the December following, I was to receive a second festive message by motor-cyclist.

Lieut. K. Hare

Allied Fête. Brussels.

A Grand Fête is being held at the TOWN HALL, BRUSSELS, at 21.00 hours on the 20th December, in honour of the officers of the Allied Armies.

The party from the 14th Division will proceed by 'bus on the 20th inst., and will return on the 21st.

You have been selected to represent this Battalion.

You will proceed by 'bus leaving 41st Inf. Bde. Hqrs., Bondues at 09.00 hrs. on the 20th.

19.12.18.

It was signed by the Adjutant.

I received many congratulations on my good fortune.

"It'll be a historical ball," said somebody, "like the one they had before Waterloo!"

"Same place too: the Town Hall!"

"They say the King and Queen of the Belgians are to be host and hostess!"

"Hare, you *are* a lucky devil! You'll see some skirt too: not like this bloody Bondues!"

Depression vanished like morning mist. Heart and the anatomy generally, might put a good face on the matter, or go to the Devil and not take a return ticket. Dancing is Heaven when one is in the twenties! I reported to "Bde. Hqrs." at "09.00 hrs." whistling to myself the air of the moment which

had come up from the underground, and into the open: the air that everybody was humming, whistling, or warbling:

*A bas Guillaume !
C'est un filou !
Il faut le pendre,
Il faut le pendre,
Il faut le pendr'
avec la corde au cou !*

In other words:

The rogue Wilhelm
May give up hope,
For we will fit him,
For we will fit him,
For we will fit him
With a length of rope!

No musical training is required by those who sing this ditty. The air is that of church bells: *any* church bells. It had been dangerous to sing it aloud during the "Occupation", as the virile genius who composed this koh-i-noor amongst lyrics, manifestly intended to satirise Wonderful Wotan, the Master of the Master race! But as the air was that of church bells—*any* church bells—what was to prevent the tram drivers from beating out a chime, or a peal, upon their klaxons? And when they did so, the brighter spirits could explain to the hog-witted amongst their fellow passengers the sinister implications of this piece of sprightly symbolism.

CHAPTER XIV

VENETIAN INTERLUDE

MILLAIM, with its baths and antiseptics, had cured me of that detestable complaint, scabies. "Insects" had been taught the meaning of that old-world stage-direction, *Exeunt Omnes*. I had a skin now clear as a new-minted sixpence, and felt in fettle, for the ball. I was presentably though not pedantically clean, for the battalion had been without soap for three weeks. My new batman, however, brought enough water in buckets to quench the thirst of several camels; and a piece of extremely rough rag which made a tolerable substitute for a loofah.

The problem as to how to make the leopard change his spots has gravelled the philosophers. That of making my tunic and trousers do so was solved by that ingenious man who had me in his sartorial care. He mixed water with a brownish-whitish clay, and with this preparation he fairly painted the whole uniform over; every speck, if not cleaned away, was at least completely concealed! How I should have appeared after a downpour of rain, I can't say. Perhaps I should have been in a position to present "Wall", in Bottom's play. But we were in for a fine dry spell of frosty weather, and it would be absurd to meet trouble half-way.

"By George! You've brought Bond Street to Bondues!"

My artist smiled with modest pride.

"But I'm afraid, Sir, I've made you rather lighter than 'regulation'!"

The omnibus in which we travelled, a typical London 'bus and one of the many imported into Flanders for the war, went "all out"! Only once during a meteor-like passage across the map did we stop for a moment. That was when we struck the hind-wheel of a push-cyclist, and sent him flying. He picked himself up and rubbed his legs.

"Are you hurt?"

"*C'est la guerre*," he replied simply; and he was wrong, poor devil; it was the peace.

We had set out at nine that morning. We reached Brussels by nine at night. Snow lay everywhere upon the cobbles, and

sparkled in the lamp-light. Every window shone in the superb Town Hall, that masterpiece in a square of masterpieces! The rest of my party went straight in without dinner; but knowing the town well, I sought out a restaurant where I knew they would not let me down; nor was I disappointed. I had soup, veal with the etceteras, cheese, fresh butter, and a bottle of burgundy. After this, mine host produced a couple of "*finés*".

"We have had this hidden from the Boche throughout the Occupation, but I produce it for *you*. Pray drink a glass with me: 'To the Honour of the Allies'!"

So I did not go to the ball famished, but after food and drink: things of more importance to "mere man" than Cinderella's glass coach to her, or a whole battalion of rats or mice metamorphosed into footmen. The band of my old friends of the *Ier Régiment de Grenadiers*, under the baton of Monsieur Lecail, *Inspecteur des Musiques de l'Armée*, played with imaginative courtesy a programme which consisted almost exclusively of English items; amongst them selections from Norton's *Chu Chin Chow*, then at the height in its vogue.

Our Host and Hostess were Burgomaster and Lady Max deputising for the King and Queen of the Belgians. The pleasure of meeting exquisitely dressed and hair-dressed women, with tinted nails, and perfectly fitting shoes, can only be imagined by those who have been reduced, at some period of their lives, to a state of sexless savagery. Ceremony was dispensed with, that all might feel at home—où il a de la gêne, il n'y a pas de plaisir—and one talked to, and danced with whom one would, without formal introduction.

Not all our partners followed the fashion of the moment. One of mine wore a gown of powder-blue, embroidered with many *fleur-de-lis* in gold. A memorable pageant! K. approached me, one of my three Commandants of Ypres, whom I had last seen booted and spurred, and mud from heel to head. To-night he looked a courtier. "Are you thirsty?" he asked. "*Il ne faut pas avoir soif dans l'hôtel de ville de Bruxelles!*" And he piloted me to a bar, explaining that to avoid the bare possibility of such a disaster as *thirst* in the *Town Hall*, the Belgian Government had commandeered all the champagne in the town, for the two months' series of royal fêtes.

I had barely returned to Bondues, when I drew the lot, in the lottery which entitled the winner to Christmas leave in England. My O.C. congratulated me on my "invariable good luck",

adding, "You shall have your third 'pip' on your return. I am putting in for it, and you will come back to it. You shall see!" With this piece of information I was overjoyed. But Nemesis had decreed otherwise.

Shortly after my return to England, I was seized with more acute heart-trouble and hæmorrhage. A medical board judged me unfit to rejoin my unit. I was appointed instead to clerical work in the office of the Machine Gun Corps Records at St. James's Park. I was too ill to take any active measures, though perhaps I might have written to my late C.O. reminding him of his promise. In any case, I didn't do so, and realised later that I had missed something which I had set my heart upon achieving.

I was to pay now, it was decreed, for my being twice in houses when they were struck by shells, for being twice blown up, and for Green Cross gas; no less than for my day-long tramping of the roads of Flanders, arrow-straight between their poplars. As yet, however, I was able to stifle all gloomy forebodings. I set off upon Christmas leave gaily enough, my orders being to report to a certain convent at Armentières, which had been taken over as a rendezvous for leave-going officers. Here I was to dine, sleep, breakfast, and depart the morning following for Boulogne.

On the road there I got into conversation with a Flemish farmer, who invited me into his farmyard, and showed me his children—two boys and two girls, whose ages might be from four to seven. They were playing skittles, with four unexploded Mills bombs for bowls.

"Those things can't hurt them, can they?" The children had kept them indoors. They were in perfect working order, with no trace of rust. One had only to pull out the pin! I explained the mechanism to the farmer.

"But what am I to do with them, *Monsieur*?"

"Bury them!"

He dug a deep hole, and in this I carefully placed the bombs, when he filled it up again; the children all this while watching me resentfully: the foreign killjoy who had ruined their game!

Christmas at home was an enjoyable affair, but I began now to realise the extent to which the war had played havoc with me. I was for ever collapsing on tubes and 'buses. I fell, one morning, three times in the Strand.

My new clerical job was intended to relieve me of strain, until such time as I should come before a final medical board which

should decide, in more formal fashion, what my next moves must be. In theory this was excellent; in practice not too good. My office was on the topmost floor, and the lift was almost permanently out of order. I would climb up, up, up, feel for the door-handle without seeing it; feel for my chair, and sink into it in a state of collapse. Until I had rested a short while, I would be unable to read the papers set before me. We were all war-invalids in this precious office!

The Major in charge of the department, had lost his left arm, and was awaiting the arrival of an artificial one. When he saw me invalidated by syncope, he would say, "I give you an hour off. Go and walk in St. James's Park." This was exceedingly sympathetic: but it meant the stairs again.

One of my fellow clerks was a man of indestructible high spirits. When wounded with shrapnel, his M.O. had said: "This is serious, you know! We shall have to have your leg off."

To which he replied, "Have a real good time, Doc. Take my head off!" We were in the office together when they told him that his artificial leg had arrived.

"And I was learning to balance so well!" he cried, and flinging aside his crutches, he leaped about the room on the one leg, throwing his arms this way and that, to maintain his balance. "Pavlova!" he cried, "God damn it, Pavlova!"

Eventually I was demobbed, and with a small grant towards medical treatment added to my "blood money", I retreated to Cookham, with a view to recuperating in country air. A civilian doctor having diagnosed my hæmorrhage as the mere effect of sore throat, I followed his advice in "saying nothing about it, at the Board!"

At Cookham, I was often in intense pain and yet, upon the whole, I believe it would be untrue to say that I was not happy. The weather was glorious. I exulted in my recaptured freedom, in the sunny foliage, in the shifting sparkle of water, and the flash of jewelled light as the Kingfisher darted from his hole in the bank of clay. It was at this time that, amongst other things, I wrote my sonnet, "Night".

I would that life were one blue summer night
Prolonged to ecstasy, one warbled note
Sustained for ever. Starry bloom should float
From spectral boughs that mock and cheat the sight,

Perfume and pearly lustre should delight,
And through the pollard's lank, disjointed coat
And upright hair, the moon should hang and dote,
And dabble the brook's crystal in her bright
And yellow flame. Anon the low elf-plaint
From the bat-loved fantastic forest side,
Should creep sweet-audible though far and faint,
And the rapt swan from the enchanted stream,
Should wake for no to-morrow but still glide
A phosphorescent wisp, a wraith, a dream.

I was concentrating on a new composition, the narrative poem, "Glaucus", which was later to appear in my volume *New Poems*, published by Benn. I would rough my stanzas out by day, sauntering or lying in the grass, and fashion them into their final shape in the late evenings, over dock glasses of port, in the courtyard of that pleasant inn the "Bel and the Dragon," with a great moon climbing up over the weathered chimney-stack.

When "Glaucus" and the other poems of the volume appeared, they evoked a world of sympathetic appreciation from the critics; and as I have faith in my work, I am not going to play the modest ape, and pretend to think their praises undeserved. The reviewer of the *New Age*, for instance, wrote:

"In the capacity to delight, Mr. Hare shines in almost extravagant contrast to his contemporaries . . . His realm is that of pure beauty. In 'Glaucus' and 'Estrildis', he has written two long poems of a more perfect loveliness than any other which has appeared in our time."

The *Liverpool Post* was no whit less appreciative:

"A note, so pure, so sweet, so stern, has seldom been heard since the Elizabethans stopped. Their descriptive richness, their bright epigrammatic wit, their stanzas illuminated with beauty like missals, all are here. His treatment and philosophy are dateless as the morning gleam. 'Salmacis' can be read with delight by the side of 'Venus and Adonis'."

A lady visiting Cookham on holiday, solved for me the problem of fresh air without exercise, besides achieving miracles in the way of brightening my existence. At this distance of time, her name escapes me, but I owe her an immense debt of gratitude. She had a punt on permanent hire, and her two daughters whom I found enchanting company, would punt me along the lovely stretch of river, lazy hour after lazy hour: lazy, that is to say, for *me*!

After some months, my heart recovered sufficiently for me to risk a return to my beloved Bruges, with a view to recuperating my depleted finances by lecturing. Here I made the acquaintance of Louis Wilkinson—Louis Marlow, the novelist—and his wife, and dined with them on not a few occasions at the Belfort, a café which had achieved about this time a reputation for good cooking.

One sunny morning, I caught sight of G. K. Chesterton on the terrace of the Memlinc Hotel. I did not know him personally, but had heard him speak at the To-morrow Club, on the topic of *To-morrow*, when he expressed the characteristically Chestertonian view that though "there was not much to be said either for yesterday or to-morrow, there *was* a great deal for the day *after* to-morrow, and the day *before* yesterday".

I had long desired an opportunity for thanking him for an article in which he had accorded high praise to my verse translation, "Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight". This seemed such an opportunity.

"You *are* Mr. Chesterton, I believe?"

"That is my name."

"I have long wanted to thank you," I said, "for some exceedingly flattering things you once wrote when reviewing my poem, 'Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight'."

"I remember the article very well," said he, "and I meant every word of it. I should write in the same way if I were to review your book again."

I thought this handsome and told him so. I did not see that formerly familiar figure, Gilbert, the sculptor of the "Eros" of Piccadilly Circus, seated in his black slouch hat on the terrace of the *Café des Etrangers* in the Great Market square. Diffidence had always prevented me from introducing myself to a man so much my senior. I was now assured that my hesitancy had been misplaced; that the sculptor would have welcomed my society, both since I was a poet, and he himself often homesick.

One heard tell at Bruges that his house there had formed part, at one time, of a long since demolished monastery. It possessed an organ. On this, I was assured, he played as a master, but solely for his own delight: and that of eavesdroppers. His sculpture has the abiding quality of pure beauty, being characterised by a never-failing symmetry, balance, and graciousness. George Verfaillie, a Fleming by birth, a small hotel-keeper of the town, assured me that within a fortnight of his arrival

Gilbert was speaking Flemish, with its local dialectical peculiarities, so as to be "mistaken for a native". Gilbert is a spiritual descendant from the Renaissance, and like the men of that virile day, possessed a diversity of talents.

When last I visited the Victoria and Albert Museum at South Kensington, in the days before this second world war, I found a torso by Gaudier-Brzerska well in evidence on the first floor. It was long before I could light upon a specimen of Gilbert's exquisite art. I did at last though: in a basement! It is odd how whilst we are proud of a variety of institutions: our navy, our public schools, our police, for instance, we seem as a nation to be almost vandalistically indifferent to our native arts and artists. Long before the days of V.2, we were destroying the Wren churches!

My heart at this time, had ceased to give me any very serious trouble, but such was not the case with the effects of the gas, which still showed with cough and occasional blood-spitting that I was fundamentally unwell. From the fact that I was earning my living by lecturing, my Belgian doctor, an army man and an excellent man in all respects, was side-tracked into assuming my complaint to be some advanced form of throat trouble. When the crash came, he exclaimed, "Why didn't I think of that before! *Gas!* All my young officers are going the same way. You have 'T.B.'"

Everybody I knew was kind and considerate. Madame Daled, the wife of the Curator of the *Musée Communal*, arrived at my small hotel with her son René and brought me roses. The *Pension Forrier* at which I was staying, was packed with visitors, for we were at the height of the season; and to cope with this influx the proprietor and his wife had but one cook and two general maids. Despite their routine work which kept them busy whilst the season lasted, every hour of the day and not a few of the night, the two maids found time to play an active rôle as hospital nurses.

Fearing lest by smoking I should make my throat yet worse, they threw all my smokeables out of the window. They would raise me up—I could not stand upon my feet—to pour egg-and-milk down my throat. So often as she could snatch a moment, the Proprietress would lend a hand, and encourage her maids. And to the assiduous nursing and sheer good heartedness of this little community of three I very thankfully acknowledge that I owe my life. On such an occasion one may say, "Thank Jupiter for women!"—and on other occasions also.

Once while lying in bed more dead than alive, a parson pushed the door just sufficiently open for him to be able to take a view of me.

"Send for me if I can do anything," he said. As he forgot to leave his name or address I refrained from dictating a letter to my secretary, to despatch to him by the second footman, or the groom, or the butler, or the boy in buttons! My parents arrived in response to a wire, and I was conveyed to an English sanatorium. Here I was "put on silence", and given a slate on which to write if there were anything I needed. Nature's own treatment, fresh air and rest in unlimited quantities, began in due course to produce their beneficial effects.

During the first stages of my malady, I had composed at Bruges the lyrics "Post-War Conditions"; the little trilogy "Youth—Love—and Death"; "The Fire Sinks", "Life", "The Future"; all of which later found a home in *New Poems*. Now I began again to compose with rapidity despite high temperatures, and the gramophone of the fellow in the room immediately beneath my own. The moment the official "rest hours" were over, he would play, "Four jolly Sailormen Back from the Sea"; and rarely less than three times in succession. I fancy it was his only record! I suffered also from a queer hallucination.

On the back of a novel, *Bruges La Morte*, I had seen a cover design representing a woman in Victorian costume, with the ultra-long skirts of that day. Temperatures rise towards night-fall, and in the late evenings, I would see her—life-size this time—looking at me through the window. There was nothing terrifying about this experience: indeed after the first moment of surprise, it was hardly disconcerting. And there was certainly nothing psychic about it, for though I saw her clearly, I never suspected her of being there. After a while, she refrained from visiting me: perhaps because I showed so little interest in her.

So soon as health permitted, I settled down seriously to the composition of a narrative poem, "Sir John Philpot", the hero being a man of mettle in his day, and Lord Mayor of London. The action is in the fourteenth century. It seems to me that, in this poem, I have struck out something of an original genre; inasmuch as writers who are poets, rarely take the trouble to acquire an intimate knowledge of the everyday life of a period, whilst those who *are* at the pains to acquire such knowledge, are rarely poets.

My next remove was to Switzerland. Georgina, Countess of

Dudley, was at the head of a committee which specialised in care for wounded officers. This austere-looking, splendid-hearted woman offered me, on behalf of her department, first-class boat and rail tickets from Victoria to Montana.

"Honestly, third class will do perfectly!"

"I should not dream of allowing you to travel third!" she cried decisively.

A girl typist handed me my book of tickets and: burst into tears! Such was the effect upon a young lady of a poet whom gas had metamorphosed into a goblin! On my way to Victoria Station, I stopped the taxi for a moment to leave a bunch of roses for Lady Dudley with her secretary: an insignificant acknowledgement of an act of unalloyed kindness and human sympathy. I broke my journey at Paris, where I stayed the night at the Palym, a small hotel within hail of the "P.L.M." station. I had a soaring temperature that night, so did not wander forth.

Despite the sunshine, I found the Swiss air cold after that of Norfolk, but the sun, *that* was pure bliss! Whilst adding the final touches—how many of these "final" touches have I added since!—to my "Sir John Philpot," three times, in the course of one morning, the ink froze in my fountain-pen! Our chief doctor was a man of parts, an excellent amateur violinist, and the holder of two international gold medals, the one for skating, the other for ski-ing. My writing intrigued him, and he would express astonishment that I could compose poetry at a temperature at which a pen, even when held in a warm hand, freezes!

But that was not astonishing. One must have a *daemon* to write poetry at all. And one must have passion, and the intellect, and character, and infinite patience which is requisite to shape that molten lava into ever new forms of beauty. And all this without thought of gain!

Allow me a momentary dissertation. Very few things infuriate me more than the efforts of our mass-educationalists to make school-children compose poetry. In like fashion, the Victorians used to put child victims with no ear for music to hammer for hours at the piano. Chancing some while back to be sitting on a 'bus beside a small girl who was scribbling industriously, I had the curiosity to ask her what she was at work on.

"*Poetry*," replied the little harassed wretch, "for *homework*!" I intend no disparagement of the child when I say that what she showed me was drivel in groggy metre. That education in the composition of poetry is superfluous is manifest from the fact that

Shakespeare emerged without it. If it were *only* superfluous! But it is actively harmful! The fabulous quantity of tenth-rate verse which is *already appearing*, as the result of the attempt by mass-educationalists to make every child a poet, acts as so much camouflage to obscure the work of the true poets when they arise; one cannot see the wheat for the tares!

The Elizabethans had two strings to their bows: the patron and the public; and many of their patrons were men of genuine insight and ability. Such was the Earl of Southampton—if it were he—the patron of the youthful Shakespeare. To-day the poets have *one* string only: the public. And to suppose that the “average man”, the “man in the street”, loves the highest when he sees it, is to suppose a self-evident absurdity! He will unquestionably prefer the rubbish churned out by the efforts of the mass-educationalists; and in this category let me lump all those of whatever degree who regard poetry as a form of journalism, such as those ingenious hucksters who are for teaching people to write the sort of poetry that editors want! Such systems discourage original thought, and do but instruct the all-too-ready apes in the art of mimicry.

To mass-education in poetry, the poets themselves owe less than anybody. Of Stephen Phillips, the poet of “Paolo and Francesca”, the only poet of his day to uphold the Elizabethan tradition of drama in verse, the “Dictionary of National Biography” informs us, “Odd guineas from poems in the Press frequently saved him from starvation.” John Davidson whose lyrics “Cinque Port”, and “In Romney Marsh” are both masterpieces, from lack of those same “odd guineas”, shot himself in Cornwall. Richard Middleton whose verse is technically flawless, and some of whose lyrics are triumphs of pure Hellenic beauty, chloroformed himself in penury, in Brussels. And all this, mark you, *not* during the Wars of the Roses, *not* at some day of public turmoil or pestilence, but in our twentieth century, with all the trumpets of all the educationalists blaring full blast.

Had these poetry-propagating pedants helped *these men*, they would have done brilliant work for culture, and added to the glory of their time. But, of course, they did nothing of the sort! Educationalists are impotent to discover genius. Like crazy gardeners, they neglect the opening rose, whilst squandering fortunes upon manure, for the purpose of broadcasting it over docks and nettles! So far as poetry is concerned—I confine myself

to that particular—mass-educationalists are the enemies, not the friends of the culture of their day; and I could willingly behold their earnest foolish faces peering from pillories, and dripping with the juice of aged eggs.

I return to Montana. I stayed here under hospital treatment from 22nd November, 1923, until 30th April, 1924. I was strongly advised to remain yet another year with a view to building myself up. Had I taken this advice, I daresay I should have avoided sundry lapses from health from which I have suffered since, but I feared to become idle, and exist like the lounge lizards on lotus. *New Poems* appeared before I left Montana, and my social history, the quaintly-named—but that name was the publisher's!—*Our Cockney Ancestors*, was ready for the press. . . .

I have often in the course of my life been astonished at the persistence of the sex instinct, when everything else has gone. While I was in hospital, a young engineer and victim like myself of gas, entered my room one morning when I was writing, and not much in a mind to be disturbed.

"I have just been washed," said he, "by the prettiest nurse in this building: and I was too ill to appreciate it!"

Half an hour later, he was dead!

I was now allowed a certain amount of exercise, and prized the opportunities thus afforded me of visiting the country round about. I was thriving in that wine-sweet air, and the following short piece may serve as a key to my prevailing mood at this time.

THE MOUNTAIN POOL

Under the pine and fed by the mountain snow,

'Neath the green-gilt rays of the sun that slant and shine,
Lies a pool, the most secret thing in the world that I know;

Under the pine.

The surface crisps with such waves delicate-fine,
As none but the babes new born of the Zephyrs blow,

And none but a minnow could dread, the least of his line!
Watch it at dusk, a rose in the rosy glow,

A thing of beauty, a dream, and a joy divine!

And forget, forget, if the hours glide swift or slow

Under the pine.

I was now less rigorously confined, and could even slip out occasionally under the rose. One evening, having accepted an invitation to a dance at a hotel in the neighbourhood, I tipped the porter at our establishment to sit up for me. In all long

illnesses, there is a danger of the patient's becoming stale, and I have observed, and hold as an unfailing rule, that men who fall to the folly of coddling themselves, are invariably the last to recover, if indeed they ever do so at all.

"How are the patients?"

"My sober citizens die like flies; but my rakes and drunkards flourish like the green bay tree!"

The reply was that of a wit; but he was also an exceedingly able doctor and psychologist.

When in the morning the party broke up, a blizzard was coating the windows with ice, and filling every corner of the world with snow. I borrowed from a native, Swiss over-shoes to put on over my pumps, and his cloak which hung in voluminous folds. This was further provided with a hood which not only protected my crush-hat, but prevented its being blown away. Thus muffled, I sallied forth to do battle with the elements, fighting my way through the eddies and—I had almost said—*leaning* against the steadier blasts of snow-filled air. Once treading upon what appeared to be solid ground, but which proved to be a drift parallel with the road's surface, and extending laterally as though in continuation of it, I fell through, but was lucky in catching at the branch of a tree which held fast.

From this situation, I extricated myself not without some danger. I scrambled up the frozen bank to the road again undamaged save for my dress-suit, and reached hospital at last. I looked through the folding doors and saw: nobody! Wearying of his vigil, the night porter had gone to bed. He had had his tip anyway: so what was there for him to wait for? Here was a dilemma. I tried the door at the back. This also was locked!

The snow was falling less thickly now; the wind blew with decreasing violence; the skies were clearing and there was a faint suggestion of the dawn of a moon. This was to the good; but it didn't help much! I must ascertain if there were no open window anywhere through which I might climb, and so regain my bedroom. At last! Here was what I was seeking: and more than I had dared to hope for: a window wide open and on the ground floor! I reached up for the sill, and in a trice had hoisted myself up. Here, upon the sill, I crouched.

My hesitation was natural. I neither desired to awaken the occupant of the room, nor be mistaken for a burglar. Were an alarm to be given, I should rouse every soul in the institution!

There was a downward drop of four feet or so. I must take care to fall lightly on my toes. Suddenly the world lit up! I turned my head. A round, foolish, nursery-rhyme moon shone out at my back. *And* it was arousing the sleeper.

I looked about, forward again, and jumped! The figure in bed proved to be none other than our Doctor in Chief! Awakened upon the sudden, he—there is no other word for it!—*bellowed* at me.

“It’s all right, Doc! It’s only me, Kenneth Hare! Sorry!”

And without ceremony, my cloak billowing out behind me, I quitted the room. He had looked so ferocious that had he possessed a gun at that moment, and that gun loaded, I could not doubt but that he would have shot me! But why? In Heaven’s name, why? At worst I was breaking bounds: surely this was not so very criminal? Besides I was a walking advertisement for his treatment and skill. A thriving patient who sets light by orders, is better publicity than the corpse which obeyed them! No, there was some mystery here which I couldn’t fathom.

The following morning *à l’heure de l’apéritif*, the Sphinx solved his own enigma.

“I fell asleep,” said the Doctor, “whilst reading *Dracula*, and dreamed of vampires all night. Something woke me—the moon, I think,—and *there*, right before my eyes, framed in the window and *actually crouching upon the sill*, was a figure in a hood, cloak, and queer boots! I howled at it! God! And do you know what it was? It was *that Hare!*”

This simple narrative provoked a good deal of laughter.

We were now due to leave hospital, and a short spell of leave being granted us before the final winding up of formalities, a friend and I decided to spend it at Venice. Having arrived at this important decision, we set off within five minutes, after throwing into two suit-cases whatever happened to come first. Two years ago we had had as near a glimpse as either of us fancied, of the banks of Styx and the hated cypress trees. To-day we were robust creatures, untrammelled as larks, and joyous as schoolboys on their first day of holidays.

As the train sped past those superb lakes, Guarda and Maggiore, laughing in the sun like jewels, two Italian gentlemen insisted upon our taking their corner seats.

“We can see this scenery any time we like, but you are visitors.”

How well one remembers such acts of courtesy, and how they warm one to the country wherein one meets with them! . . .

I could wish that my first view of Venice could have been that which delighted our grandfathers, before modern times brought us railways. Then, whether one approached beneath the moon and stars, or the midday splendour, one first beheld it across the sparkle of the sea. This is how Byron, Browning, Shelley, first saw Venice; and how Keats would have seen it had the Fates been kind.

And yet although one must regret that bringing of the railway from the mainland, there is nothing in life quite like that first glimpse of the Grand Canal, as you come upon it with startling suddenness, after the confinement and close air of the modern station. *Now* you are one of the scurrying crowd, pent beneath dirty glass roofing amidst newspaper kiosks and slot machines; and *now* the porter has thrown your suit-case into the rocking gondola, and its prow cleaves the ripples of the enchanted waterway, as the boatman impels you forward through the violet night, beneath a golden moon.

All the way as he oared us on to our hotel, our gondolier sang as merrily, and with as little self-consciousness as a bird! I looked about me.

"Marvellous!" I cried with something like a gasp of delight.

"*Ma, si Signore!*"—"Why yes, Sir!" cries my fellow breaking off a moment in his singing, "*è bellissima, il Canale Grande: e poi è casa mia!*"—"It's superbly beautiful, the Grand Canal, and then it's my home!"

VENICE BY NIGHT.

Venice by night! Deep lamps that dance in the stream
Like fiery snakes; and a great moon orange-bright
Climbing to seaward, to bathe—like a moon in a dream—
Venice by night!

Bound for the ball, the gondola thrusts in sight,
And the girls in the Chinese lanterns paly gleam,
Need a master to limn them forth for the world's delight!
Venice! what have you lost, since great minds deem
That gifts of the spirit outvalue material might?
For your joy, for your joy of the soul, let a poet esteem
Venice by night!

My friend Larry and I knew not a soul in the city, but we were not destined to be lonely, for even as the porter flung my

case into the boat, light as a faun, Tina had leaped in after it! I never dreamed that she existed, until her slight weight set our boat rocking! Her name only was ridiculous. It should have been Julia, or Oriana, or Alethé, or that of any other of the thousand and one runaway girl pages of the Elizabethan poets. But to her name only—by Jove!—was it possible to take exception.

Her age was nineteen; her limbs as symmetrical as those of the nymphs which Donatello has fixed for us for ever in Italian terra-cotta. Her skin had that quality of lustre which Titian—himself a Venetian—never wearied of portraying, and which makes so notable a foil for his ladies' pearls. I love full lips, and such were hers; her mouth a blossom; her teeth little, regular, and white. Her eyes swam in health and laughter. And catching something of radiance from that fantastic moon—that ingot of gold distilled into a glass of crystal—her hair glimmered with amber light. What a miracle she seemed after life on a rock, amidst the Alpine snows!

Something of all this I tried to tell her, in language torn from the phrase-books, this night of April and of Venice: the Queen of Cities, and the Queen of months. And as I hesitated and floundered, the gondolier sang louder: but now from tact! Larry was kicking my ankle.

"You will find a friend for my friend?"

"*Io cerco per lui una bella Veneziana; molto migliore di me!*"—"I'll find him out a lovely Venetian girl: much nicer than I!"

"Good, then I can go ahead!" But the gondolier is roaring now so that I can hardly hear what Tina is saying! Tact is a great matter, and song divine, but he is making a public nuisance of himself! I *glare* at our nightingale, and the ditty freezes in his throat! Tina accompanied us to our door, and gave us a tryst for the morning.

The hotel gave us fresh butter, hot rolls, fruit and coffee for breakfast and—prosaic but welcome—bacon and eggs, a tribute to the carnivorous British. A gentleman at the next table required no such luxuries. He simply smoked a foul cigar. Wreaths of greenish smoke climbed upwards and polluted the atmosphere. He noticed my look.

"Yes," said he, "this is my breakfast always; I am a Czecho-Slovakian."

Larry and I strolled forth from the hotel.

"Larry, Tina said she was going to bring her friend this morning."

"Still I don't believe in banking upon anything until it's absolutely there before you. I don't suppose your Tina will crawl out of bed till tea-time, and then she'll have forgotten all about it. And *then* what's one to do in Venice? I'm damned sure there are no golf-links in the cursed hole!"

"She'll come!"

"I'll admit that I'd like to see her friend. If she's prettier than Tina, she'll do! Fact is I'm hoping against hope she won't let us down."

We took a few turns. The morning air was revivingly cool. The dome of Santa Maria della Salute gave her snow-white reflection to the water. Larry handed me a cigar he had somehow procured, manufactured locally from imported hay.

Suddenly I heard a joyous shout of "*Kennetario!*" So she had naturalised my name! I sprang forward to welcome her. To my mind she looked as ravishing this morning as she had last night, although there was now no confederate moon to scatter magic. But Heavens! who was this with her? This raw-boned, disgruntled-looking phenomenon! Could this be—Oh, no! that was impossible. But then: who else *could* it be?—that "beautiful Venetian much prettier than I" to whom, as we floated through Elysium under the stars, she had promised to introduce my friend? Oh! the duplicity of women. She had had this then "up her sleeve"?

"No!" cries Larry explosively, but with perfect elocution. "No! *Damn me, no!*"

My phrase-book Italian breaking down under the strain of diplomatic representations—I could only find "The Tailor's Shop", and "Passing through the Customs" at this crisis—Tina's friend interpreted "Damn me, no!" as "Charmed I'm sure!" and stepped with us into the gondola! And there she *was*! I don't think somehow that Eva was a very sensitive girl.

"A stiff drink!" said Larry, and I commanded the gondolier accordingly. Larry had denounced Venice for possessing no golf-links. Larry had called Venice a "cursed hole"! And now Venice was having her revenge! We drew in at a quay hard by the entrance to a *calle*—an alley-way built to exclude the sun—and the proprietor of a wine-shop at its far end, divined our mission, and with bacchic gesture fell to flourishing a cork-screw above his head!

"What a bandit he looks," cried I, "in his blue shirt!"

I had not reckoned upon his knowing English!

"You are mistaken, *Signore*," said he laughing, "I *am* the gentleman. It is my brother who is the bandit of the family!"

He roared with laughter, and his brother came out into the front shop from the cool interior gloom within, to share in the joke.

"This is my brother, *Signore*," says our host flourishing the corkscrew, "and one of the worst scoundrels I know! Aren't you a ruffian?"

The brother apparently knew no English, and as the tone of the enquiry was suave, he supposed a compliment intended and expressed assent by lavish gestures. And then my blue-shirted brigand laughed again, crying—

"He admits it, you see!"

Then his brother laughed again, although still ignorant of the jest. To drown my inadvertence, I called for drinks round, and we had several more rounds after that, and collected a pleasant cargo of bottles to stow away in our waiting gondola. With a bottle in each hand beneath her cloak, to give the effect of wings, Tina did a turn as a small and wren-like bird, hopping with extraordinary agility from chair to table, and from table to chair. The blue-shirted giants roared their bravoos, and Larry who had been drinking Asti Spumante like water, mellowed sufficiently to confide to me that life being what we all knew it was, things might conceivably have fallen out worse.

"In fact," said he, "I would rather be with Eva in Venice, than held up to ransom by brigands in Morocco."

"Of course," I encouraged him, "and it won't cost you so very much more either!"

I wish I could give fragments from Tina's table talk, but at this late hour, only one trifle comes to mind.

"Tina, what do I say at the Customs when they ask, 'Have you anything to declare?'"

"*Niente, Kennetario.*"

"And what if I have something to declare?"

"*Niente, sempre niente!*"—"Nothing, always nothing!"

We tried to persuade the girls to swim with us in the Lido, but in this we were unsuccessful. The modern swim-suit which can be drawn through a ring was already the vogue; but sunning was a new thing, and the pair trembled for their complexions. Though Eva's face was homely, the lines of her body were by no means bad; her breasts were firm, and could only gain in crispness by the astringent effect of sea-water.

"If I were rich, Larry, I should design Tina a bathing-suit myself. Its main features would be tight-fitting breeches of rose-coloured silk, and a brassière of gilded butterfly net. The silk would be sheer silk, of course. Euclid's views on feminine underwear are well known: 'Length and breadth but no thickness'."

Larry and I, in the end, had to swim by ourselves. We sunned and philosophised, despite the insistence of a pedlar of dried sea-horses tied in bunches with blue riband, to which he invited our attention under the magnificent appellation of, "*Granda famiglia Sea 'Orse!*" It was an ideal day, on which to aestheticise, lying on the baking sand, with our wet towels across our eyes, to shut out the glare of the sun. I commented on that idiotic dogma of Hitler's—whose villainies were yet to come—viz, that "art must be *national*".

As though "must" were a word to apply to the waywardness of genius! What poets had written more nobly of Venice than the English: Byron, Shelley, Browning? Was it a home-bred Venetian who had peopled this sea-city with such ever-living characters as Bassanio, and Portia, and Shylock? And when was Turner more divinely inspired than when he depicted the ship, *Il Sole Di Venezia*, putting forth to sea in a shimmer of iridescent mist? Are we to destroy at the bidding of a house-painter, the works of Holbein who painted King Harry, and Van Dyck who painted King Charles?

So I would talk, and Larry let me, for he is a sympathetic soul and knows that talk is as necessary to me as life. But as a scientist, the arts are beyond his field. His personal contribution to the discussion was the somewhat assertive confession that he could see no essential difference between the Canova group, "Cupid and Psyche", and a photograph of a French tart in her stockings. Apart from his tendency to decry England whilst enjoying its benefits, and to extol Ireland when at a comfortable distance from its snakeless soil, Larry was a man of method, even of routine.

As we waited for the girls' arrival after our swim, with a bottle of Cinzano and glasses for four, I was prepared for it when he confessed to me—not without some bashful hesitation—that he was "becoming *addicted* to Eva". And Heaven knows I had begun that way with Tina! Had not the God of Finance, Plutus, taken charge of our affairs over our heads, I half believe we should be in Venice to this day; supervising families, "addicted" to

our wives, and smoking unspeakable cigars! But where to-day would be youth which lent colour to all? ·

We should have faded, Larry and I, into that heretic twilight in which the hues which once shone in the rainbow, survive but as those of tapestry, and looking into memory as into a crystal, I should not see the young girl in whom—to my unsophisticated eyes—the beauty of the Renaissance seemed to blossom anew: revealing a world of other-worldly magic: kindling a fire in my soul: and setting bells jangling in the frosty places beyond the stars!

CHAPTER XV

COTSWOLD WOODS

It was now Venice to Montana—to collect my things—and Montana to London, whence, upon medical advice, I removed unwillingly to Sussex and to solitude. Of the natives, if there *are* natives in Sussex, I met with none except shepherds, whom the proximity of London had made the shrewdest of business men.

“Would you mind looking after my sheep, Sir? Just for a moment? So that I can run down to the village for a pint?”

How astonished this good fellow would have been had I replied, “Yes! I’ll have a shot at it. But of course I’ve never kept sheep in my life, so you mustn’t mind if they stray over half the county.”

I gave him his pint, of course.

I purchased a sheep-dog, Flipper, whom Hugh Kingsmill, when pitying my exile, he ran down to pay me a flying visit, termed appreciatively, “The Doormat With a Soul”. Women friends also visited me from time to time. My main recollection of Sussex however is one of extreme boredom. I had become accustomed to the masculine conversation of Continental café terraces. And to varying solitude with multitude. Poets must have multitude, or they will have nothing to write about, and solitude or they will never write. It is astonishing with how little constructive talk the average Englishman contrives to get through life! The working classes have their pubs: but what of us others? Chess and the newspapers absorb the club members in the conversation-lounge, although the “Silence” placard in the writing-room occasionally reminds somebody of something he wishes to say.

In the arbour of the garden of the Ship inn, Lewes, I composed my idyll “Leda”, which has since appeared in an anthology. Say, rather, here I made the rough-out, that first sketch written at post-haste, in order that the full vitality of the original conception may be preserved. But long afterwards, I kept this rough draft by me, and walking by wood or water, revising and

retouching, I brought it up ultimately, as I hope, to the highest possible degree of polish.

I was happy in my work always, and a lyric written whilst tramping through the June sunlight from Storrington to Arundel, records some joyous if contemplative moments.

SUSSEX DOWNS

Up to the good green hill,
Where sky-larks climb and shrill
Through sunbeams yellow;
Where gorse and thyme scent meet,
And each gale blows more sweet
Than did his fellow!

And now, the crest attained,
We'll think that something gained,
This ridge shall show us
How looks, when June is young,
This sky-lark oversung
Green world below us!

The patterned meadows make
A chequer: that's our lake,
The slight patch gleaming,
With two bright specks thereon,
Each twinkling point a swan,
Asleep and dreaming.

The Bishop's Castle seems
A bosky world of dreams
To glide or fade in,
While from the tranquil walls,
A long blue shadow falls,
The herd may shade in.

The turf whereon we lie
Is like a nether sky,
With all the nations
Of heath-flowers dewy-bright,
Their eyes aglow with light,
For constellations!

A shepherd calls his curs,
Rounds up the loiterers,
Then sleeps before a

Copse he long approved:
Man not unbeloved
Of Pan and Flora.

A dragon-fly forth springs,
With opal flash of wings,
A blithe new-comer!
And mighty bees anon,
With solemn bagpipe drone,
Cry, "Summer!—Summer!"

Although as I have said, I got to know few natives, I met many interesting Londoners and others, who had made Sussex their country retreat. A London lady, for instance, invited me to dine at her "farm". I was to bring Flipper, of course: that noted personality, with his silver-coloured coat, was much in request. I was met by the daughter of the house, looking most efficient in overalls.

"Yes," said she, "when I'm not yachting, I'm usually to be found being dragged by a calf across a muck-heap!"

Anxious to prove that he too was a devotee of efficiency, Flipper bounded forward and, in a trice, had herded two valuable polo ponies through a narrow gap in the hedge, and out on to the high road and a flood-tide of char-à-bancs! He then reported back, to see in what other matter he could be of service. To my relief, the son of the house, a young officer, laughed consumedly. Together we raced Flipper to the spot, and I succeeded in persuading the beautiful creature to reverse his former manoeuvre, and return his host's ponies where they belonged.

A gardener repaired the gap in the hedge, and with many expressions of kindness, Flipper was given temporary lodgings in a roomy stable: political prisoner of the first class! Had he been left longer at large, he might have herded the cook into the drawing-room, or the housemaid into the butler's bedroom. Flipper was a brilliant, eccentric aristocrat, and had initiative.

The "farm" had a bar which contained cocktails prepared from every recipe known to the cellarmen of London, Paris, or New York. Were agriculture always conducted thus wisely, there would be no need for the slogan, "Back to the Land". Towards the liqueur stage of dinner, my hostess turned to me and said, "What does Flipper usually take at night? I've sent the maid out with some lamb cutlets and peas. Do you think he will fancy them?" When last I heard of this most hospitable family, the

son of the house had rejoined his regiment in India, my hostess had returned to town for the London season, and the daughter had gone to Tunis for the winter. Yet another British family had *forsaken the land*.

Frankfort Moore, the novelist and ex-*Times* leader-writer, also showed himself the soul of hospitality. As an Irishman he was fond of rating Goldsmith above Dr. Johnson.

"We should none of us have *heard* of Johnson but for Boswell, and even *with* Boswell, none of us have ever read a word of him; but we shall read *The Deserted Village*, and see *She Stoops to Conquer*, so long as there's taste or wit left in this country."

He observed that the Club to which Johnson and the rest belonged, showed themselves singularly callous with regard to the execution of Dr. Dodd.

"They dined and drank as usual," said he, "and the hanging of the unfortunate clergyman, merely provided a stimulus for conversation!"

Frankfort Moore recalled the heroic days of journalism when there was big money to be made, for the competitors were few.

"I was setting out with my wife and two daughters for Italy, when I received a telegram from"—he mentioned the newspaper—"to this effect: 'Send back Ode Queen Victoria's funeral'—I replied—'Impossible. Setting off holiday Italy now, with family.' They wired again, 'Will pay three weeks, tickets and hotel expenses. Send ode.' I accepted of course."

Work so produced is not to be confounded with poetry. It is not everybody who can do it for all that. Frankfort Moore could write with staggering rapidity, and he was a journalist born.

"The topics they gave me were of a type which naturally aroused emotion in a reader, and therefore there was the less need for me to emotionalise my verses. The form I chose was the pindaric, so that the lines need not be all of a length, and there were: *lyrical repetitions*."

Although he did not say as much, I gathered from the twinkling of his eyes, that both form and repetitions were labour-saving devices! To-day only two lines of the master-piece remain in my memory.

"The drums, the drums, the drums!
She comes, she comes, she comes!"

The public sobbed. Did the poet smile? They gave him his holiday, his train fares, his hotel expenses for *four*, and three weeks of Italian sunshine in exchange for the Ode. Fleet Street was Fleet Street in those days!

In the museum of St. Leonard's, I had seen a handsome and obviously genuine statuette of a dancing faun. I mentioned it to Frankfort Moore.

"Yes," said he laughing, "*I saved that for the town! The old spinsters of the neighbourhood had protested against the faun as 'indecent', because it was represented according to Nature, without a fig-leaf! After a decided tussle—for I didn't want their one thing of aesthetic beauty to be scrapped—we compromised, and the faun was allowed to remain, provided that he was placed: back to the audience!*"

One needs a Frankfort Moore in every provincial town throughout England, to prevent the citizens destroying their own treasures! Even as I type these words, the good folk of Stroud are demolishing two unique specimens of the Cotswold style in domestic architecture, two jewels of the Fifteenth Century, with drip-stones, gables, stone-mullions and all! And with the exception of myself, not a soul protests! But when I called in a local builder to put a window into this platitude amongst buildings, my modern cottage, which lacks any distinguishing architectural feature whatsoever, he had hardly put the scaffold-poles in the ground before I received a form—in the thick of the paper-shortage!—bidding me, "declare the nature of structural alterations". There you get our muddle-headed bureaucracy at its fruitiest! One might suppose that I had been adding a wing, on my own responsibility, to Hampton Court! I suppose some people like being kept in leading-strings by imbeciles, but what a very un-English taste!

Frankfort Moore also succeeded in securing for Lewes its handsome war memorial—one of the most striking in the country—a symbolic Liberty which stands facing the hills. But for his efforts, all the money collected for the purpose of commemorating the fallen would have been dissipated on *parish* memorials—obelisks and the like—instead of *one* monument, but *that* worthy of the town!

In Lewes I met with a Hungarian who showed himself—such is my modesty!—to my astonishment, a reader of my "*Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*". He had passed his student days, he informed me, at Gottingen, and assured me that had I

brought out my translation there, the authorities would have given me an honorary degree on the strength of it.

Another acquaintance which I esteemed myself happy in making—for her appearance suggested a younger and better-tempered Mona Lisa—was an American returning from a holiday in Japan to her home in Arizona. And this lady did, I remember, introduce me to a Sussexian who had established a record by being born in Sussex: to two, in fact, a stone-deaf grandmother, and her political granddaughter, who was plotting to forsake the county of her sires, race to London, lay her head upon the bosom of Mr. Bernard Shaw, become a Fabian, and subvert the state.

In the dog Flipper, the County gave me the most distinguished of its indigenous inhabitants. But the latter end of his life was tinged with tragedy. Run down by a car, my grey and silver friend, though not otherwise injured, developed a singular eccentricity. He now barked with ferocity at every person carrying golf-clubs. The crisis came when he held up a golfer on the steps of his own hotel! I looked out for another situation for him, and was successful in getting him a job on cows, with a genial milkman who swore to give him a good home, and added, "*I detest golf too!*"

I introduced some traits of Flipper, in the following free adaptation of an episode from the *Dionysiaca*, the Epic of the Greek poet Nonnos.

THE DOG PÁN GAVE BACCHUS

Bacchus for Nicaia's love,
Though he doth the mountain rove,
Nowhere can the nymph surprise;
Still the elusive huntress flies!
High-horn'd Pan who marked the quest,
Gives the baffled God the best
Of the sheep-dogs which he bred,
Patient and with panther's tread!
Mighty Pan knew not the Vine,
Nor the Dog, the Lord of Wine.
Narrowly regarding him,
Long of coat, sturdy of limb,
Slack'ning now, now mending pace,
Still assisting in the chase,
Graciously the God address't
The companionable beast—
"Still you turn and gaze at me

As you would converse. I see,
 When the hair blows from your eyes,
 They are thoughtful, faithful, wise,
 Who had thought in beasts to find
 Loyal heart, and soul, and mind?
 Love-tormented, yet I feel
 Joy when we two share a meal
 At high noon, beneath a beech.
 Vagabond! Did Pan then teach,
 Or had'st thou the gift innate,
 Lovers to compassionate?
 Bring me to this lovely one,
 And to 'quite what thou hast done,
 When thy mortal life is spent,
 In the glittering firmament
 I will èternise thy fame,
 And the 'Dog-Star' be thy name!"
 "Master, thanks!" the Dog replies—
Looks his thanks with loyal eyes—
 And beneath a thorn-bush creeping,
 Shows the God Nicaia sleeping
 By a limpid rock pool sweet,
 Oft her bath in summer heat.
 Honouring Bacchus, fertile Earth
 Gives the honeysuckle birth,
 Bids him wed the rose for shade,
 And still climbing, shroud the maid
 Till the sun from that green night,
 Show but twinkling pricks of light.
 Bacchus in triumphal hour,
 Enters now the blissful bower,
 On the naked limbs that strain,
 Roses and sweet odours rain.
 Eyes profane were all thence barr'd,
 For the Dog kept loyal guard.

In 1927 Benn brought out my prose work, *Our Cockney Ancestors*: a trivial title, but that was insisted upon as likely to possess popular appeal. It was a series of historical sketches of London life from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. I neglected no effort to make myself a master of my facts, but having done so, I determined to exercise my prerogative as poet, to make these facts *live* by the exertion of imaginative power in their reconstruction. My endeavour to capture the equipment of both parties, scholars and poets, met with success, the press

conceding accuracy of presentation together with a convincing vividness.

Running up to town from Sussex, on one of those sallies which I thought of as "coming up for air", I made the acquaintance of the lady whom I had later the honour of marrying; since I was no longer the vagabond spirit I have depicted elsewhere in earlier pages. Yet when I asked her the most important question a man can ask a woman, I was impelled by motives which were old when Stonehenge was regarded by sticklers for tradition, as a wanton breach with traditional architecture! I had totally lost my head about her, and was convinced that I could not be happy without her! Passion cried, "Full Speed Ahead!" Experience has since endorsed the wisdom of the sailing orders given by that wild companion.

From Sussex I removed to London, and thence, in the November of 1930, to the Cotswolds with my wife. The late W. H. Davies lived at no great distance from us, and I made the acquaintance of that sterling spirit in this county. Davies gave me a copy of his *Autobiography of a Super Tramp*, and I him an anthology which contained, amongst other things of mine, the Cotswold ballad, "The Gates". Davies told me that "The Gates" stood out as his favourite in the book. "I remember reading it before, and have always wanted to read it again." ("The Gates" is given at length in "Gloucestershire", my contribution to the *County Series* edited by that enchanting naturalist Brian Vesey-FitzGerald.) Walter de la Mare, in a typically Delamarian letter, referred to "The Gates" as, "a rollicking ballad of the good old kind: and an excellent refrain!"

On my trips to London in the summer and autumn of 1937, I would often lunch at the Salisbury Tavern in St. Martin's Lane, in the neighbourhood of Dan Rider's shop which I have already described. *Plus ça change!* I was in the same atmosphere at the Salisbury as I had been at Rider's. The tavern was the resort of artists, writers, and scholars. My old school-friend Ion Swinley, the Shakespearian actor, was a frequent visitor. Charles Duff, the author of *This Human Nature*, and Hugh Gordon Porteous, the Chinese scholar, were also Salisburiensians. Thomas Burke—who was thus introduced to me, "Burke! meet Hare!"—Philip Lindsay occasionally; and Douglas Goldring, the novelist, and pacifist: he would have endured the thumb-screws to vindicate the right of the worm *not* to turn! During the '14-'18,

Goldring endured for his belief all manner of slights and hardships. Be the cause what it will, a martyr is always respectable. And then his *Odd Man Out* redeems its author from being that chimaera the part author, part propagandist for which Richard Middleton, the poet, coined the useful word, "propagartist"!

Frederick Carter, A.R.E., etcher, and John Flanagan, the portrait painter, were also habitués; and Ivan Opfer, that most brilliant of press portraitists! Opfer would come in carrying a prodigious canvas-bound portfolio. And since he travelled the world over, one never knew what might be "in the bag"! I fished in it once, I remember, and drew out, for my first catch, G. K. Chesterton and Einstein! On another occasion, it might be a rich soap-boiler, a noted revolutionary, or a popular preacher!

Amongst the poets were Seumas O'Sullivan, Austin Clarke, Hamish Maclaren—poet of haunting rhythms and other-worldly magic!—Patrick Kavanagh, and John Gawsworth; all men who kept their heads during the neo-romantic, post-Georgian landslide; who preferred the apt to the startling epithet, lucidity to obscurity, and form to chaos. Maclaren had been a naval officer, and was later literary editor of the *Spectator*. "*Dulce est desipere in loco*": he would steal away before the symposium was at end, to indulge a secret passion for shove ha'penny at the rival hostelry over the way.

John Gawsworth who was awarded the Benson Medal of the Royal Society of Literature, is possessed by a daemon so active, that the titles of his works alone occupy an entire page of the British Museum catalogue! And he is only in his early twenties! Gawsworth can be witty, he can be ironic, he can be terribly disillusioned, but never does imagination fail him, nor sincerity, nor classic directness. I like him best in his happy objective moments of sensuous joy in the human form, as in "The Flesh of Cypris", a lyric of which collection concludes with that line of witchcraft—

"More sorrow than the Bridge of Sighs can span."

—A line in its own way as lovely as the often-quoted—

"A rose-red city half as old as Time."

Does one believe in telepathy? I suppose so. I had not met Alec Waugh for several years. I was laughing over his witty story, "Madame Zélie" and the philosophic reflection with

which the hero orders the second bottle of champagne, when I received a letter: from Alec, of course! There is no mistaking that handwriting on an envelope. Picture the smallest script in the world; yet every character perfectly formed. In just such calligraphy, and with the smallest wren-chick's quill, did Pigwigen compose love-epistles to Queen Titania.

"This is fine news," Alec wrote, "that you are to write your reminiscences. I enormously look forward to them. Will you have a chapter about Hugh Kingsmill? I hope you will. He used to talk so much about your pre-war travels with him, during our prison days in Germany, in that alcove behind the Citadel at Mainz that he describes in *Behind Both Lines*. You were his chief conversational character, you and Frank Harris, that's to say.

"I wonder if you have any idea how you were built up by him for our benefit—by 'our', I mean in the main, 'Oxo' and Gerard Hopkins." ("Oxo", Holmes; a promising young journalist who died prematurely, and obtained the M.C. for heroic conduct during a raid upon the German trenches.) "He had the type-script of one of your narrative poems—'Glaucus' wasn't it?—and Oxo used to intone it in that sing-song way which didn't really improve your rhythms; but *that* you might have forgiven him for the sake of the enthusiasm that inspired it.

"Hugh talked about you so much that we almost doubted your existence. Nobody in real life, we thought, could be made so real. And I think we were all of us a little shy of meeting you afterwards. The man who has been built up in advance always starts at such a disadvantage. And what a very pleasant surprise it was to find that Hugh hadn't managed to do you a disservice. I do look forward to reading *your* version of those pre-war travelings of yours and of your harangues in your lecture hall on the Quai Dyver. . . .

"And there'll be Bruges, won't there? Do you remember taking me round to the drawing-room of a funny little old Belgian woman who, even in 1921, couldn't be persuaded that the German occupation was really over? How I envied you, and envy you, your times there! And there'll be pen-portraits of immediate acquaintance, I expect. 'Bouley'" (E. G. Boulenger, of the Aquarium at Regent's Park; the writer of many books and articles upon zoological matters mentioned before). "'Bouley' as a schoolboy—how incongruous that sounds. He hasn't changed since I've known him, which is eighteen years. I'd imagine him to have

been at that very age of adult youthfulness—a young uncle to Peter Pan—at which I've always known him. And there'll be—but if I let my pen run on, I'll be sending you a synopsis of your own book which is not at all what I meant to do.—Hurry up with that book, Kenneth, because I want to read it! Best luck! *Hasta la vista.*”

It was while lunching with Alec that he asked me if I had ever met Gaudier-Brzeska, the sculptor. We had forgathered at the Spanish restaurant off Piccadilly, to discuss one of those melodramatic native dishes, a chicken fried in olive oil with tomato, “*cèpes*”, slices of orange, pimento, peppercorns etcetera; which we had washed down with a couple of bottles of Rioja, agreeably mellow, yet not so mellow as to kill its native appetising roughness. We had survived, and here was Alec asking me if I remembered Gaudier-Brzeska?

I recalled him very well; a young fellow who appeared to have inexhaustible stores of physical energy upon which to draw. His forehead broad and intelligent; his eyes large, fine, and sparkling; his mouth small and well-shaped; and his nose—no defect this in a man—large above the ordinary. Such a nose is an unfailing indication of character. His ears stood out a trifle from the sides of his head. I guessed, and learned later that I had guessed rightly, that he was keenly appreciative of great music. His suit was a cheap reach-me-down; I was told afterwards that he was, at this time, very poor. His hair was long, and badly cut.

How I wish I could recall having liked him: the reverse was the case. I met him at the studio of Francis Hodge, R.A., and the conversation turned upon Greek art for which, even as a schoolboy, I entertained an almost religious veneration. I had been in the habit, whilst yet a Pauline, of making countless pilgrimages to the British Museum, to study the Elgin Marbles, and the “*Nereides*”, sources, to me, of never-failing inspiration and delight. My disgust then can be imagined when Gaudier loudly stigmatised the entire range of Greek art as “pretty-pretty”. In the tones of one enunciating a platitude, he maintained that intellect, in Greek art, controlled instinct to such a degree as totally to submerge it; that the result of Hellenic restraint was to restrain away spontaneity, originality, and inspiration.

The fact that such a line of argument would put the totem of a savage higher, as a work of artistic creation, than a dancing

faun, or indeed than the Aphrodite of Melos herself, seemed to trouble him not whit. Of the Greeks in relation to their thought, letters, religious feeling or mode of life, I suspected that he knew less than anything. Yet art is the illustration and comment upon a civilisation; not a thing *in vacuo*. It must be judged in relation to its time, no less than to eternity.

But my growing exasperation lessened considerably—I no longer pined to be back in the eighteenth century with him, that I might have the pleasure of “calling him out”—when having sent both Greeks and Romans packing, Gaudier fell with even greater virulence upon the sculptors of the Renaissance, with Michelangelo at their head! Here at least, one might have imagined, the unquestionable intellectuality of these men hardly restrained away spontaneity, imagination, or emotional force. In the whole range of the arts, can anything be conceived of as less “pretty-pretty” than, say, the “Slaves” of Michelangelo: or indeed any of the creations of that colossal, tortured, heroic spirit?

I suspect that envy is the driving force in the majority of such attacks; the man who vilifies women, is generally he who finds that they reject his advances. I very much doubt if Bernard Shaw would ever have uttered that stupendous piece of nonsense, that “Marlowe never wrote a mighty line in his life”, had Nature not denied to him, Shaw, the ability to compose any line which is not characterised by a suburban flatness! Compare with any line you will of Shaw’s “The Admirable Bashville”, that which I quoted above from John Gawsworth’s, “The Flesh of Cyprus”,

More sorrow than the Bridge of Sighs may span,

and you will realise that you are weighing, one against the other John’s golden ingot with a handful of garden mould. Those achieve most who decry least.

The last time I saw Gaudier was also at Frank Hodges’ studio in Glebe Place, Chelsea. I was thoroughly enjoying everything and everybody, when the sculptor entered. Within five minutes, he was airing his monomania; boring the ears as with a gimlet. “Damn the Greeks!” he kept saying. One can’t be rude to a fellow guest at a social gathering, but one can leave. I got up and left. Gaudier-Brzeska died in battle in the ’14-’18.

As I write these memoirs, the second world war draws to its

close. I volunteered at once for service in any capacity whatsoever overseas. After a considerable lapse of time, I received a negative reply.

*The War Office,
Thames House,
Millbank,
London, S.W.1.
9th April, 1940*

Sir,

I am directed to refer to your application for registration as a member of the Army Officer's Emergency Reserve and to say that it has been given the most careful consideration.

It is, however, much regretted that owing to your past medical history, it is not possible to carry out your enrolment.

I am to add that the offer of your services was much appreciated and that it is realised that but for the fact above mentioned, you might have been a valued addition to the number of registered members of the Reserve in question.

I am, &c.

Perhaps, my old gassing apart, I had been foolish to apply. One forgets that one grows old: but Time remembers. I joined the Home Guard, however, at the outset, in the days when it was known as the Local Defence Volunteers, and attended that most interesting course at Osterley Park. On its conclusion, I took a 'bus for Twickenham and my people.

"You're lucky to be on *this* 'bus, Sir," said the conductor, as he gave me my ticket.

"How's that?"

The fellow grinned at the exquisite jest.

"The 'bus before this was machine-gunned; shot to scrap!"

I 'phoned my old people.

"Ken speaking: Hullo! Mother; can I come to dinner?"

"Yes; dinner at seven *sharp*!"

The following morning I obtained a lift in a car, almost as soon as I got out of the gate; how neighbourly the times made us! The owner of the car was going to Putney. Excellent!

"That's on my way."

"Good! Jump in then."

At Putney, I was no less fortunate.

"Can I——?"

"Yes, if we're going the same way," said I, "I'm making for Paddington."

The Alert had sounded, and the streets were clearing.

"Good! I can take you as far as Madame Tussaud's." We sat together in front. The back of his small car was piled high with coils of rope. Who *was* he? A dealer in rope? An amateur yachtsman? An itinerant hangman? Baker Street way, one heard machine-gunning. The Huns were strafing a pig-balloon. They didn't bring it down.

"I just *adore* these raids," observed my strange companion, in a burst of confidence. They get people off the streets. One can never get any speed on, ordinary times. Crowds get in your way. And the Police are so damned fly. But during a raid, the streets get cleared, and one can go *all out*, and there's no one to pull you up. One can go *like Hell*! The Police are too busy to bother. Here we are: Praed Street—Marylebone Town Hall: that do you? Good luck!"

From this point, a lorry carried me straight on to Paddington Station. The raid was still in progress, and the young lady at the amplifier was almost exhorting the waiting crowds of passengers to take advantage of the shelters provided.

"There is danger from splinters of glass. No passenger need fear to lose his train. Porters will be sent to warn passengers of the departure of their trains, ten minutes before these are due to leave the platforms." But nobody took the faintest notice. They just continued standing or sitting under that glass roof. The man on my right, finding life a dull affair this morning, was reading the usual thriller of *The Man with the Wolf's Eyes*, or *Death in the Bathroom*, type. On my left, without getting up from her seat, a young mother was wheeling a pram a few inches forward, then a few inches back. Pleased with the soothing motion, the baby smiled.

"There is danger from splinters of glass," the voice began anew. "No passenger need fear to lose his train——" The man read on absorbed. By raising and lowering the handle, the young mother imparted a slight rocking motion to the pram. The baby slept . . .

In what part of England would one choose to live when the time comes—whether one will or no—for taking things more tranquilly? Devon? Sussex? Gloucestershire? I knew all three well, but gave my vote for the last. There is less sun here than in the south of England, and more rain than in the east. Yet here one can still light upon little lost villages which Time would seem to have forgotten, and which serve as reminders of the unbelievable beauty of England as our ancestors knew it.

And although they are felling our trees with unchecked vandalism,
a Cotswold wood remains a thing to glory in!

COTSWOLD HAS HER WOODS

Through marshy flats the streams of Sussex glide,
And mirror back no grace of woods unshorn
Loved of the nymphs: no satyr babes are born
For them to suckle, the bleak down's bare side
Granting no harbour. Far in Devon abide
The pixies glumps'd of maids at even and morn,
When rose-cheeked crabs from orchard boughs forlorn,
Are garnered for the presses' oozy tide.
But Cotswold has her woods the Romans knew,
Where strange things chuckle, elfin eyes glow bright,
Snake creeps, or hedgehog runs, or fox slinks past,
Where dens, banks, vapours smother the moon's light,
And through the obscure brake though the nymph fly fast,
With speedier foot the following fauns pursue!

As with others, so with me, this war has drawn a plough across my affairs. But I have always made it part of my philosophy to adjust myself to my day. This is better than to throw in one's lot with the "plotters and planners", who think to create the "brave new world" by enslaving the old. The artist brings his dreams to market but, unlike that other dreamer the politician, his visions cost no soul a penny who does not desire to pay! A cottage in the Cotswolds: no castle assuredly; but I have no quarrel with Fate. I have become accustomed to country sights and sounds, and would not willingly be parted from them: my Airedales Rollo and Ricky when they leap up in welcome: the evening star at nightfall, a flawless chrysolite. Cocks shattering darkness with voices like flames.

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